DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 524 EA 031 197

AUTHOR	Riley, Pamela A.
TITLE	A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out.
INSTITUTION	Pacific Research Inst. for Public Policy, San Francisco, CA.
PUB DATE	2000-02-00
NOTE	54p.; Financial support provided by the Koret Foundation.
AVAILABLE FROM	Pacific Research Institute, 755 Sansome Street, Suite 450, San Francisco, CA 94111 ($12.95). Tel: 415-989-0833; Fax: 415-989-2411; e-mail: pripp@pacificresearch.org; Web site: http://www.pacificresearch.org.
PUB TYPE	Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Attitudes; *Charter Schools; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Parent Attitudes; Principals; *School Effectiveness; School Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*California

ABSTRACT

Three surveys assessing 100 California charter schools were conducted in 1997-98. Interviewees included teachers, principals, and parents. Findings include: 7 out of 10 charter-school principals report that their schools boast waiting lists; overall, parents selected the school's curriculum as their primary reason for selecting a charter; charter-school students share demographic and socioeconomic characteristics with students in the state's district schools; charter-school principals have been able to establish successfully strong school-parent relationships and have increased parental involvement in their children's education; student attendance and academic performance remarkably improve when the student is enrolled in a charter school; 96 percent of charter-school teachers are held accountable through an evaluation process, done usually annually; 70 percent of California's charter-school teachers spend time every week on school organization and development duties; and 65 percent of teachers deploy parent volunteers in the classroom. Survey results refute the charges of critics that charter schools are racially exclusive and "creaming" only the best, most advanced students. Results also demonstrate conclusively the positive impact of deregulation, local control, and increased autonomy, while also confirming that comprehensive choice is the path to truly meaningful educational reform. Three appendices describe the survey strategy and sample characteristics, and list interview questions. (RT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 456 524

PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

By Pamela A. Riley

February 2000

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
L. McLellan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EA031197

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out

By
Pamela A. Riley

February 2000

Pacific Research Institute
755 Sansome Street, Suite 450
San Francisco, CA 94111
Phone: 415-989-0833
Fax: 415-989-2411
www.pacificresearch.org
pripp@pacificresearch.org

Acknowledgements

The Pacific Research Institute would like to thank the charter school parents, teachers, and principals who participated in this survey. In addition to contributing their valuable time answering questions in a phone interview and filling out a very detailed questionnaire, principals spent many hours distributing and collecting surveys on behalf of the Pacific Research Institute.

The Pacific Research Institute also thanks Bruno Manno, formerly of the Hudson Institute (Washington, D.C.), Mary Gifford of the Goldwater Institute (Phoenix, Arizona), and Linda Brown of the Pioneer Institute (Boston, Massachusetts). They shared valuable information about surveys that their organizations had conducted on charter school issues.

Finally, we thank the Koret Foundation for its generous financial support of this project.

Copyright © 2000 by the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 755 Sansome Street, Suite 450, San Francisco, CA 94111. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior written consent of the publisher.

Designed by Dawn Abou Khalil

Table of Contents

Executive Summary v
Introduction: Why Charter Schools Exist 1
The Early Evidence in California 2
The View from the Principal's Office 5
What Parents Say About Their Child's Charter School 14
What Teachers Say About Charter Schools 19
Conclusion: Charter Schools and the Quest for Parental Choice 27

End Notes 29

Appendix A: Survey of California Charter School Parents, Teachers, and Principals, 1997-98 31
Appendix B: Charter School Principal/Director Survey 35
Appendix C: Charter School Parent Survey 37
Appendix D: Charter School Teacher Survey 39

About the Author 41
About Pacific Research Institute 42

Figures and Tables

Figure 1 Number of Charter Schools Approved in California by Year 4
Figure 2 Prior Experience of California's Charter School Principals 5
Figure 3 Distribution of School Size for California's Charter Schools Compared to U.S. Public Schools 7
Figure 4 Characteristics of California Conversion and Start-up Charter Schools 8
Figure 5 School Year in California and Arizona 9
Figure 6 Ethnicity of Students in California's Charter and Public Schools 10
Figure 7 Annual Charter School Family Income 11
Figure 8 Education Level of California Charter School Parents 11
Figure 9 How Principals Work with Parents 12
Figure 10 Who Is Responsible for Discipline Policy 12
Figure 11 Who Is Responsible for Grading Policy 12
Figure 12 Who Is Responsible for Attendance Policy 13
Figure 13 Who Is Responsible for Selecting Textbooks 13
Figure 14 How Principals Rank Student Participation 13
Figure 15 Where Did Child Attend School Last Year 14
Figure 16 How Did Parents Learn about the Charter School 15
Figure 17 California Parents' Satisfaction with Previous School 16
Figure 18 Parental Satisfaction with Charter School 16
Figure 19 Why Parent Left Previous School 17
Figure 20 Why Parent Chose Charter School 17
Figure 21 How California Parents Grade Their Child's Charter School 17
Figure 22 How Were Children Performing in Previous School 18
Figure 23 How Are Children Achieving in Charter School 18
Figure 24 How Likely Is Parent to Send Child to School Next Year 18
Figure 25 School Teacher Credential Policy 20
Figure 26 Percentage of Certified Charter School Teachers in U.S., AZ, CA 20
Figure 27 Education Level of California's Charter School Teachers 21
Figure 28 Teaching Experience of California Charter School Educators 21
Figure 29 Educators' Experience Outside of Teaching 21
Figure 30 Reasons for Teaching at Charter School 22
Figure 31 Charter Schools and Collective Bargaining 23
Figure 32 Duration of Teacher Contracts 23
Figure 33 Who Negotiates the Teacher Contract 23
Figure 34 How Does Charter School Contract Process Compare to Last Teaching Position 24
Figure 35 Teacher Evaluation Process 24
Figure 36 School Organization/Development Responsibilities 24
Figure 37 Important Features of Charter Schools as Reported by Teachers 25
Figure 38 How Teachers Assess Student Attendance Compared to Previous School 25
Figure 39 How Teachers Assess Students' Attitude Compared to Students Previously Taught 26
Figure 40 What Factors Contribute Most to Teacher Satisfaction 26
Table 1 Six State Regions 31
Table 2 Traditional Classroom versus Alternative (Independent, Home, and Distance Learning) 31
Table 3 Converted, Existing Public School Versus Start-Up 31
Table 4 Number of Families Surveyed 32
Table 5 Charter Schools Surveyed 32

A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out

Executive Summary

In 1993, in response to widespread dissatisfaction with the state's public school system and increasing demands from parents for school choice, the California legislature enacted the nation's second charter school law. Charter schools are independent and deregulated but still operate within the government school system under a contract or charter negotiated between the organizers of the school, usually groups of parents or community groups and teachers, and its official sponsors, typically a local school board. In return for meeting the education goals laid out in their charter, the supporters of the charter receive funding from the state, exemption from most regulations, and wide latitude in curricula, hiring, and spending.

The Pacific Research Institute (PRI) sought to assess charter schools through those strategically positioned to know them best: parents, teachers, and principals. From 1997 to 1998, PRI conducted three surveys, the largest on a statewide level yet attempted. These surveys included all California charter schools that had been open at least one year prior to the academic year 1997-98, a field of 100 schools with a total enrollment of 41,531 students. PRI collected responses from principals of all 100 schools and a sample representing 40 percent of the 2,500 teachers and 38,000 parents. Some of the more important findings include the following:

- Seven out of 10 charter school principals in California report that their charter schools boast waiting lists;
- Overall, parents selected the school's curriculum as their number one reason for selecting a charter, followed by the attitudes of teachers and other staff;
- Students in California's charter schools share demographic and socio-economic characteristics with students in the state's district schools;
- California's charter school principals have been able to establish successfully strong school-parent relationships and have increased parental involvement in their children's education;
- Student attendance and academic performance remarkably improve when the student is enrolled in a charter school;

- 96 percent of teachers in California's charter schools are held accountable through an evaluation process, usually on an annual basis;
- 70 percent of California's charter school teachers spend time every week on school organization and development duties; and,
- 65 percent of teachers in charter schools deploy parent volunteers in the classroom.

The results of PRI's survey refute the charges of critics that charter schools are racially exclusive and "creaming" only the best, most advanced students.

Overall, California's charter schools emerge as a rare educational success story that closely follows the profile of their innovative supporters. The results demonstrate conclusively the positive impact of deregulation, local control, and increased autonomy, while also confirming that comprehensive choice is the path to truly meaningful education reform.

A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out

INTRODUCTION: Why Charter Schools Exist

America's government system of education, usually called the public school system, provides constant reminders that it is failing to live up to its promises of quality education for all. Foreign students easily outpace American students in math and science (American high school seniors scored last among 40 countries in the *Third Annual Mathematics and Science Study*), universities must offer remedial education, and tests reveal that high-school graduates lack knowledge in key subject areas. These and other failures have been a long time in the making.

A pattern of failure has been evident since at least 1983, when the U.S. Department of Education published the 1983 *A Nation at Risk*, a veritable jeremiad warning that unless things improved, the very future of the nation was at stake. Fifteen years later, despite a number of reforms, leading educators published *A Nation Still at Risk*, a self-explanatory manifesto. Some things had changed, it said, but the changes were neither deep nor basic. Despite tinkering with methodology, standards, class size, and other measures, the system remains a public utility with captive customers and guaranteed funding—a monopoly producing bad products at high prices—and has shown such resistance to change, some have argued for a different approach.

Instead of funding a bureaucratic monopoly, reformers argue, give parents and students the choice of where they spend education dollars. Funding the scholar rather than the institution was also the premise of the G.I. Bill, one of the more successful education measures of the post-war period. While ballot measures based on this idea have failed to pass in key states such as California, the desire for educational choice not only remains but is growing, particularly among minorities. The growing support for choice sent the system a message that it had better offer an alternative. Thus, widespread failure, plus widespread effort for choice, gave birth to the charter-school idea.

These independent and deregulated schools operate within the government system under a contract or charter negotiated between the organizers of the school, usually groups of parents, and its official sponsors, typically a local school board. In return for meeting the education goals laid out in its charter, the supporters of the charter receive funding from the state, exemption from most regulations, and wide latitude in curricula, hiring, and spending. The concept quickly blossomed into a movement.

In 1991, there were no charter schools. In 1999, at the verge of the new century, there were nearly 2,000 charter schools serving 350,000 students in 31 states and the District of Columbia. In California, the second state to pass a charter school law, 234 schools serve 85,000 students. However, as the Pacific Research Institute's *Expanding the Charter Idea*[1] noted, rapid growth and support for charter schools from President Clinton did not banish opposition to the concept.

The anti-choice education establishment continues to offer alarming rhetoric that treats charter schools as quasi-criminal operations, warning parents to beware of "charter school activity" in their neighborhoods. Teacher unions push for weak charter laws, defy and subvert the stronger ones, and even start charter schools designed to maintain the status quo rather than push reform and innovation. Administrators respond to innovative competitors in their district with obstruction and deceit. Anti-charter, anti-choice academics with ties to teacher unions, such as Amy Stuart Wells of UCLA, publish works like *Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform*, an attack disguised as research. These attacks have received more press coverage than the larger and more compelling success story of charter schools.

Educators agree that eight years is too short a span to develop a body of hard data on test scores. In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education embarked on a four-year national study to assess the impact of charter schools. The results will be released sometime in 2000 but test scores are never the whole story. The Department's database of research lists more than 75 peer-reviewed reports on enrollment patterns, demographics, and educational characteristics of charter schools and their teachers, students, and families. At the state level, policy organizations, universities, and charter school resource centers have published at least 100 more studies. The Pacific Research Institute (PRI) took a somewhat different approach.

PRI's Center for School Reform has championed the increased freedom and innovation of charter schools from the beginning. The Center opted to assess charter schools not through the lens of academia, but through those strategically positioned to know them best: parents, teachers, and principals. What does their response say about the record of charter schools? California, a bellwether state, would be the crucible for that key question.

The Early Evidence in California

From 1997 to 1998, PRI designed and conducted three surveys to explore and assess the attitudes of teachers, parents, and school principals toward the current status of charter schools and related issues. Representative samples of charter schools were selected from six state regions and by type of school within those six regions: conversion charter schools versus start-up, traditional classroom charters versus those using independent or home study, and elementary school charters versus high school.

The survey, the largest on a statewide level yet attempted, covered all California charter schools that had been open at least one year prior to the

academic year 1997-98 (100 schools, total enrollment 41,531 students). PRI collected responses from principals of all 100 schools and a sample representing 40 percent of the 2,500 teachers and 38,000 parents. (See Appendix A.)

To gain a broader, national picture, *A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out* analyzes and compares the results of the PRI survey with the findings from two national and three state-level surveys:

- *Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents, Charter Schools in Action, Parts I-V,* by Gregg Vanourek, Bruno V. Manno, Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Louann A. Bierlein, Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997. A survey of 50 charter schools enrolling 16,000 students in 10 states.

- *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles 1996-97,* Boston, MA, Charter School Resource Center, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997. A survey of 1900 parents in 14 charter schools in Massachusetts.

- *Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Parents,* by Mary Gifford and Timothy Keller, Arizona Issue Analysis #140, Phoenix, AZ, Goldwater Institute, April 1996. A survey of 6,500 families in 52 charter schools in Arizona.

- *Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Teachers,* by Mary Gifford and Timothy Keller, Arizona Issue Analysis #141, Phoenix, AZ, Goldwater Institute, August 1996. A survey of 300 teachers in 52 charter schools in Arizona.

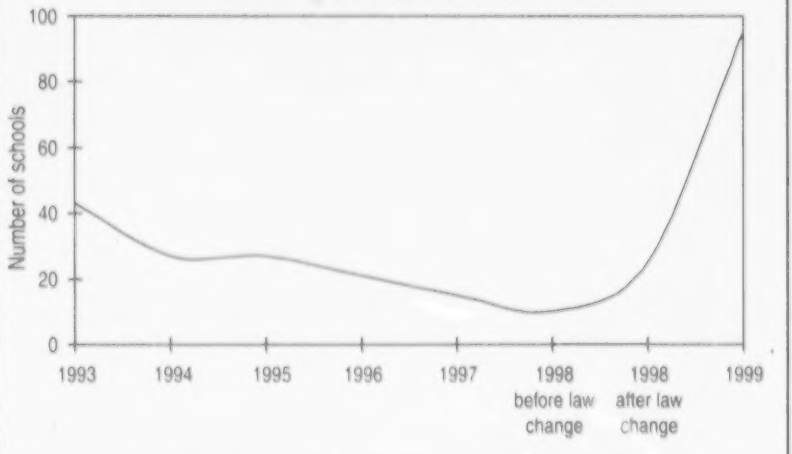
- *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report,* Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999. The third installment of a four-year study by Research, Policy and Practice, International (RPP), funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. This report included a phone survey of all 717 charter schools operating in the U.S. from 1996-1998 and a more in-depth, follow-up survey of directors from a representative sample of charter schools on additional charter school issues.

Unless noted, the source of all data reported in *A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out* derives from the PRI field surveys conducted in California in 1997-98.

At the beginning of academic year 1997-98, 100 charter schools had been operating for more than one year and an additional 14 began their first year of operation. The obstacles faced by these schools included the refusal of teachers to sign the charter petition, arbitrary denials from reluctant school districts, and the ordinary problems associated with any new

Overwhelmingly, parents, teachers, and students report that charter schools are doing better than the schools students previously attended.

Figure 1
Number of Charter Schools Approved in California by Year



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

organization. By 1997-98, the rate of charter school approvals by the local districts and the State Board of Education had slowed. In 1998, the state legislature responded to pressure from the teachers and parents who had been thwarted in their attempts to establish charter schools and amended the law to make it easier to obtain a charter. Since passage of the law in April 1998, the number of charter school approvals has almost doubled. (See Figure 1.) The PRI survey is a benchmark against which charter activity in the state prior to and after 1997-98 can be assessed.

The PRI survey also provides important data against which the California experience can be compared with the rest of the nation. Statewide surveys of teachers and parents were conducted in Arizona and Massachusetts during the same time frame as the PRI survey. This study notes the similarities and differences with other states which can shed light on the California charter school experience. Experts rank laws in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts as three of the strongest. These states account for a large portion of the charter schools in the nation and for some of the most autonomous and innovative efforts to date.

The results of these surveys tell a compelling story that has yet to reach the audience it deserves, especially among policymakers and the media. The evidence is clear: overwhelmingly, parents, teachers, and principals report that charter schools are doing better than the schools students previously attended. In assessing the results of this survey, readers should keep in mind a principle not always recognized by the education establishment: parents, whatever their race, ethnicity, or income level, are competent judges of their children's education needs.

The View from the Principal's Office

PRI's survey of California's charter school principals produced a wealth of data showing that principals in these innovative schools are enormously satisfied with the charter school experience. Moreover, charter schools are vastly different than the public schools in which many of the principals previously worked. This section supplements the PRI survey's results with data from two national surveys and two statewide studies.

Seven out of 10 charter school principals report that their charter schools boast waiting lists.

- **Charter schools have opened doors for school leaders**

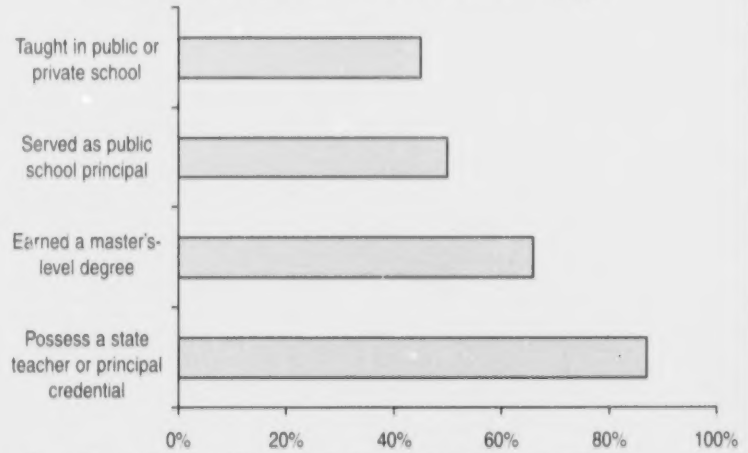
PRI's survey found that a wide range of qualified individuals from various backgrounds serve as charter school principals or directors. Only 50 percent of California's charter school principals served as a public school principal in the last previous employment. Forty-five percent had experience teaching in a public or private school. Five percent had a background in operating a business. Eighty-seven percent possessed a California teacher or principal credential. A very high percentage, 66 percent, possessed a master's degree. (See Figure 2.)

- **Charter schools are popular**

Parents are charter schools' primary constituents and they seldom, if ever, form a queue for a product they consider unsuitable or inferior. And from the beginning, before academic research could pronounce a verdict, parents were lining up.

PRI's survey found that seven out of 10 charter school principals report that their charter schools boast waiting lists. The U.S. Department of Education study reported the same result nationwide.[2] The popularity of charter schools mirrors the increased demand for all types of school choice. A recent report estimates that one in five schoolchildren, about seven million nationwide, attend schools other than neighborhood public schools.[3] Likewise, CEO America and the Children's Scholarship Fund, two private organizations that fund scholarships for low-income children, have enrolled more than 48,000 students for the 1999-2000 school year, with a waiting list of more than 1.25 million.[4]

Figure 2
Prior Experience of California's Charter School Principals



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

At present, however, the demand for choice remains frustrated by the government school monopoly. This hard reality also affects the supply side of charter schools.

In 1998, the number of students enrolled in charter schools represented a paltry .6 percent of the total enrollment in district public schools in states with charter laws.

- **Even though popular, the number of charter schools and charter school enrollment remain small compared to district schools**

Most states restrict the number of charter schools that can be started, a reflection of the clout the education establishment, particularly teacher unions, continues to wield. In 1998, the number of students enrolled in charter schools represented a paltry .6 percent of the total enrollment in district public schools in states with charter laws.[5] The strength of a particular state's law determines the proportion of charter schools and charter school enrollment compared to the number of regular public schools and public school enrollment.

Washington, D.C. enjoys one of the strongest charter laws in the nation but in 1999 a scant nine percent of its public school students were enrolled in a charter school. In Arizona, considered by most experts to have the strongest law, charter school enrollment represented six percent of the total public school enrollment.[6]

In California, which has the most charter schools in the nation, charter school enrollment represents a meager one percent of total public school enrollment.[7] In 1998, only 72 of 1000 local district and county boards of education had approved a charter petition. Only 29 of 57 counties had a charter school within their borders.

Reform-minded legislators intended that charter schools should inject much needed competition into the current system. It is difficult to imagine how charter schools can achieve this stated purpose unless their numbers and enrollment are allowed to increase. But based on the legislative history related in PRI's study of the nation's charter school laws, *Expanding the Charter Idea*, that is a political rather than educational problem.[8] Within charter schools, however, the numbers tell a different story.

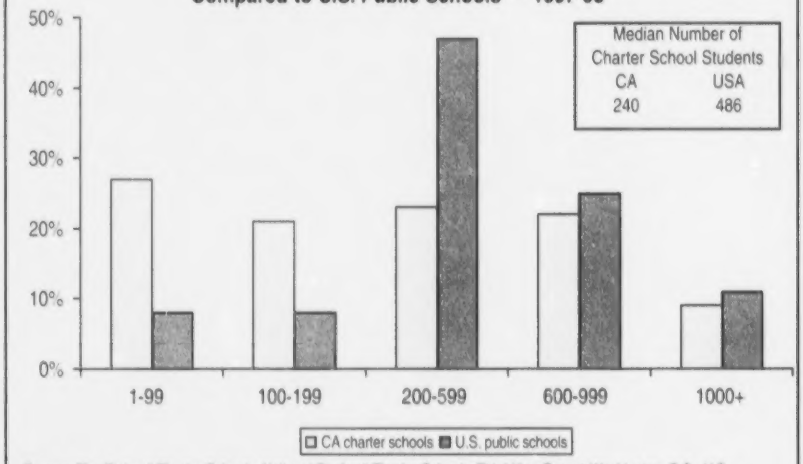
- **Charter schools are small**

Nationwide, the median student population of district schools is 486. By contrast, the median number of students served in charter schools nationwide is 132, less than one third the size.[9] California's charter schools reflect the national trend and on average are smaller than public district schools. (See Figure 3.)

In California, the median size of charter schools is 240 students, which exceeds the median for charter schools nationwide. In part, this is because California has a higher proportion of charter schools that were pre-existing public schools. Until 1999, when California's charter law was changed, it was exceedingly difficult for teachers and parents to start new charter schools because teachers at exist-

ing public schools had to approve the charter petition. Since January 1999, when a new law removed that obstacle, California's charter schools have joined the national trend with a greater proportion of newly created charter schools of smaller size.

Figure 3
Distribution of School Size for California's Charter Schools Compared to U.S. Public Schools — 1997-98



Source: *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1999.

The tendency toward smaller schools is particularly true of newly created charters. Nationwide, 74 percent of new charter schools enrolled fewer than 300 students, while only 35 percent of charter schools that were pre-existing public schools enrolled fewer than 300. The U.S. Department of Education study reports that, nationwide, only 53 percent of charter schools in 1994-95 were start-up schools; in 1997-98 the number was 84 percent.[10] In California, in 1997-98, 53 percent were start-up schools. By 1998-99, that number had risen to 59 percent and, based on the number and characteristics of schools chartered in 1999 but not scheduled to open until academic year 2000, the percentage of newly-created, smaller schools might increase to as much as 70 percent.[11]

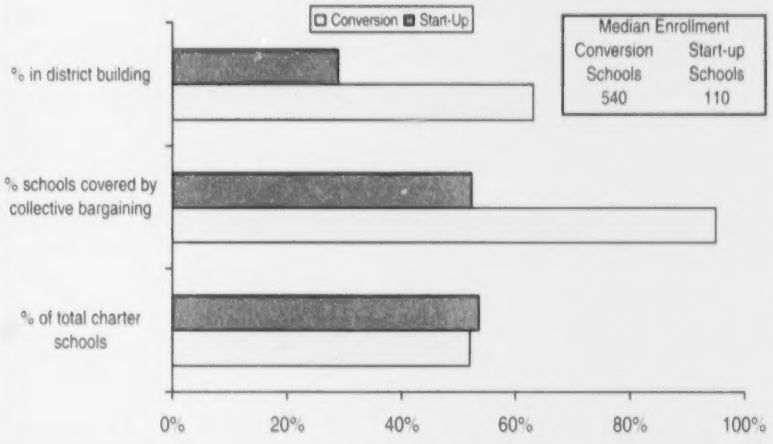
Why does school size matter? Some experts believe that the size of the school has a much greater impact on academic performance, not to mention student safety, than class size, which is also being debated. The tragic shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, a very large school, ignited a national debate. One proponent for school choice observed in *The Wall Street Journal* that the average size of private schools is much smaller than the average size of public schools.[12] The decisions of hundreds of charter school developers to keep their schools small gives weight to those who argue for the benefits of smaller schools.

The record of charter schools, however, consists not in numbers of schools or students, but what happens to the principals, teachers, and students in the school.

- **Newly-started charter schools are more autonomous and independent from the district**

The U.S. Department of Education's third-year study of the nation's charter schools noted that newly-created charter schools and pre-existing public schools that converted to charter "differ greatly in terms of school size, grade levels, the reasons that charter

Figure 4
Characteristics of California Conversion and Start-up Charter Schools



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

schools were started, the difficulties they encounter during implementation, and their autonomy."[13]

In 1997-98, 53 percent of California's charter schools were newly created. These start-up schools differed from the state's charter schools that had converted from pre-existing schools. The median size of start-up charter schools in California was 110 students compared to 540 for converted schools. Only 52 percent of California's start-up schools were covered by the district's collective bargaining agreement while 95 percent of converted schools were covered. Only 29 percent of start-up charter schools were located in a district building while 63 percent of converted schools used a district building. (See Figure 4.) When a charter school remains tied to the district with the strings that union membership and using a district building bring, it is much less likely that the charter school will be autonomous and independent from the district.

- **Charter schools are innovative in using time**

Charter schools have been innovative with the use of time—whether in configuration of grade levels, delivering instruction on a daily basis, or organizing the school calendar year. Many charter schools have atypical grade configurations. According to one national study, one in four charter schools spanned kindergarten through grade 13, kindergarten through grade eight, or were ungraded compared to fewer than one in 10 with similar configurations for all public schools. About half (52 percent) of charter schools in 1997-98 had the traditional grade-level configurations of elementary, middle, and high school, compared to 78 percent in the public schools.[14]

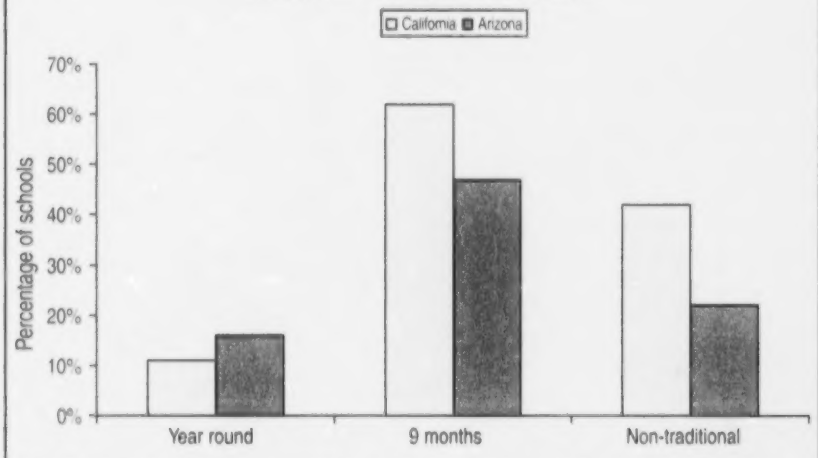
The way charter schools determine the school calendar and how to deliver instruction varies by state and is often dependent on charter school laws and the needs dictated by local conditions. For instance, in Arizona the length of the calendar year and school day emerged early as an issue. Sixteen percent of the charter schools in Arizona opted for a year-round calendar. In California, 42 percent of the schools operate on a non-traditional school calendar. (See Figure 5.)

Many of the charter schools in California that operate on a non-traditional school calendar serve home-study, independent-study, and distance-learning students. Twenty-four percent of charter

schools surveyed in 1997-98 offered their programs in a non-classroom setting. (See Table 2 in Appendix A.)

The state holds traditional public schools accountable only for the amount of "seat time" students spend in the classroom. If a student is counted during the attendance accounting period, the school gets paid whether the student learns or not. The charter idea switches accountability for time spent in the classroom with accountability for student work product and academic performance. Charter schools have taken advantage of this flexibility in a number of ways.

Figure 5
School Year in California and Arizona



Source: Mary Gifford and Timothy Keller, *Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Teachers*, Phoenix, AZ, Goldwater Institute, August 1996.

Some charter schools enroll students at different times during the school year. This is particularly common in schools that serve "drop-out" students. Charter schools that serve independent- or home-study students do not measure the school day with attendance units. Rather, these schools have devised strategies for measuring a student's work product and academic performance and then converted that product into conventional attendance units.

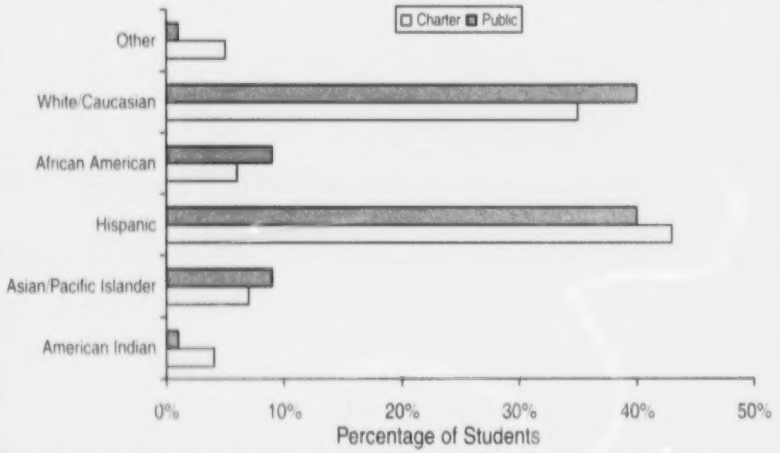
However, legislation passed in 1999 restricted the ability of charter schools to offer home- and independent-study programs by requiring increased traditional attendance accounting. This requirement, in addition to other restrictive regulations imposed by the California Department of Education, poses a serious threat to one of the most innovative features of California's charter law.

While charter schools are intended to break from traditional government school practice, in some important ways their profile remains the same.

- **Nationwide and in California, students in charter schools share demographic characteristics with students in all public schools**

Since the enactment of the first charter law in Minnesota in 1991, many opponents of charter schools have charged that these schools will attract the easiest to educate—a process called "creaming"—and will not serve at-risk, minority, poor, or special-needs students. The evidence gathered by the Pacific Research Institute, along with the other state and national surveys reported here, puts those fears to rest.

Figure 6
Ethnicity of Students in California's Charter and Public Schools



Source: *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education,1999.

PRI's survey found that 35 percent of charter parents identified themselves as white/Caucasian. Forty percent of students enrolled in California's public schools are white. PRI's survey found that the ethnic population enrolled in California's charter schools matches the general ethnic profile of the state's local district schools. (See Figure 6.)

Nationwide, enrollment by ethnicity in charter schools also reflects the general ethnic makeup of public schools. For instance, the Hudson Institute reported that white students made up 50 percent of charter school enrollment and about 58 percent of public school enrollment in 1997-98.[15] The U.S. Department of Education reported that whites represented 52 percent of national charter school enrollment, African Americans 14 percent, Hispanics 25 percent, Asians six percent, and Native Americans four percent.

In some states, charter schools enroll a significantly *higher* percentage of minority students than conventional schools.[16] For instance, in Massachusetts, 47 percent of charter school students are minorities, while the state average is only 21 percent.[17] In the words of the Hudson Institute researchers, "One might suppose that the 'creaming' allegation could now be laid to rest. Put simply, one-third of public school students nationally are minorities, while half of charter school students nationally are minorities."[18]

[F]amilies and teachers are seeking out charter schools primarily for . . . educational philosophies that are closer to their own

The economic profiles of charter schools also refute the charges of critics.

- **Charter school families are no richer or poorer than their counterparts in public district schools**

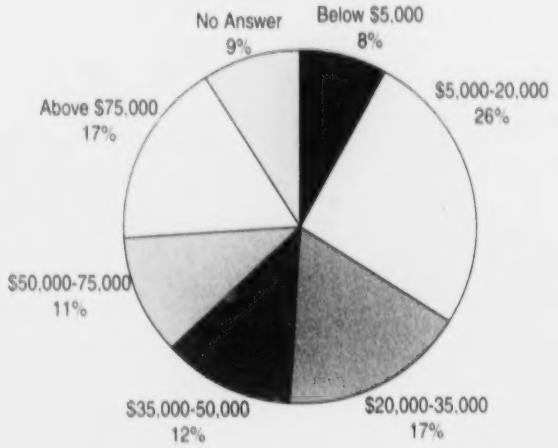
The annual family income of California's charter school families closely matches the income of California's public school families. Nationwide, the income of public school parents is usually correlated to the income levels used to determine eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a program designed for children from low-income families with an annual income below $30,000. Thirty-five percent of California's charter school families qualified for the NSLP as opposed to 42 percent of California's public school families. Fifty-one percent of California's charter school families had an income of $35,000 or less. (See Figure 7.) In Massachusetts, 39 percent of charter school students is economical-

ly disadvantaged, compared to a statewide average of 25 percent.[19]

- **Charter school families share similar education levels with the nation's adult population**

Nationwide, the largest group of adults associated with charter schools has attained "some college" education and the smallest group has attained only an elementary school education. PRI's survey found that 50 percent of charter school parents had attained at least some college. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 7
Annual Charter School Family Income



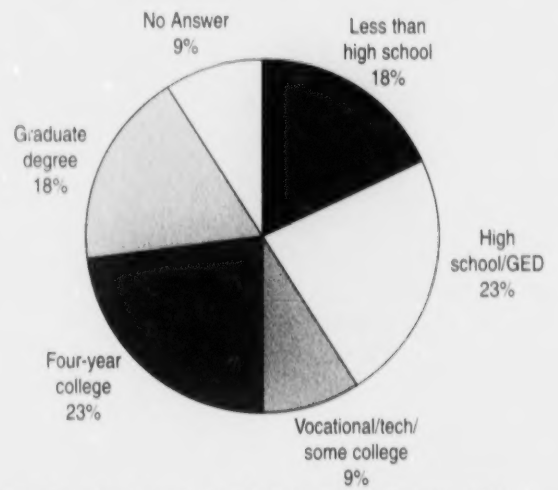
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

- **Charter schools are providing additional choices and opportunities**

Nationwide, seven out of 10 newly created charter schools have sought to realize an alternative vision of schooling, and an additional two in 10 were founded especially to serve a special target population of students.[20] According to the Hudson Institute, "families and teachers are seeking out charter schools primarily for . . . educational philosophies that are closer to their own, and innovative approaches to instruction."[21] Some charter schools specialize in teaching the learning disabled, the deaf, pregnant teens, and low-income children. There are on-line, bilingual, and core-curriculum charter schools.[22] The diversity extends to educational philosophy.

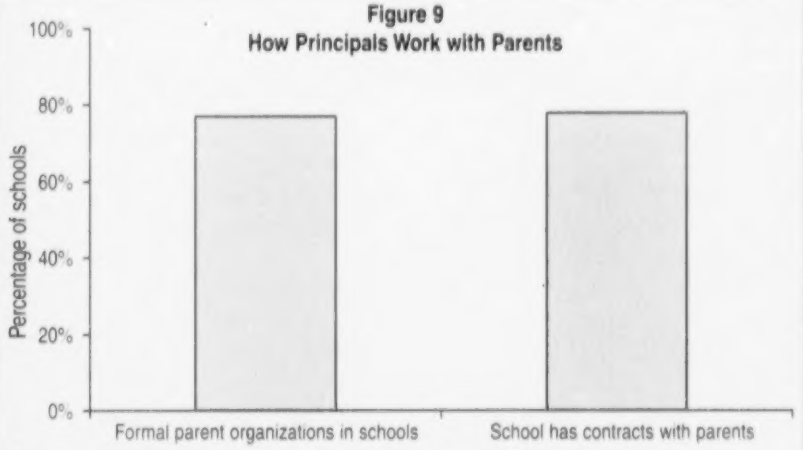
Some charters emphasize basic standards, some science, and others the environment or the performing arts. At the Renaissance Charter School in Irving, Texas, retired Navy pilot Fred McNabb teaches physics to sophomores, usually a senior-

Figure 8
Education Level of California Charter School Parents



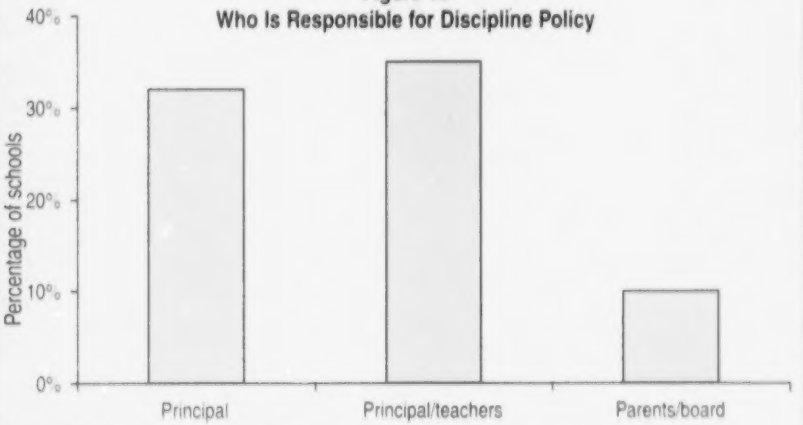
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 9
How Principals Work with Parents



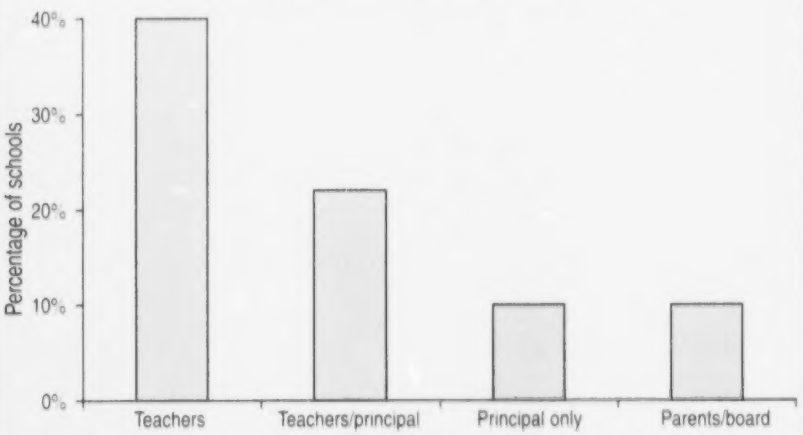
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 10
Who Is Responsible for Discipline Policy



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 11
Who Is Responsible for Grading Policy



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

year elective.[23] Such flexibility has sparked interest among parents, teachers, and principals who are dissatisfied with the rigidity and one-size-fits-all approach of conventional government schools. The U.S. Department of Education study reported that four out of 10 charter schools that converted from a pre-existing public school did so to gain autonomy from district and state regulations.[24]

- **California's charter schools and their principals have created new strategies for organizing and governing the school**

California's charter school principals have been able to establish strong school-parent relationships and have increased parent involvement in their schools. Seventy-seven percent of school principals report that there is a formal parent organization at the school. Seventy-eight percent report that the school has contracts with the students' parents. (See Figure 9.)

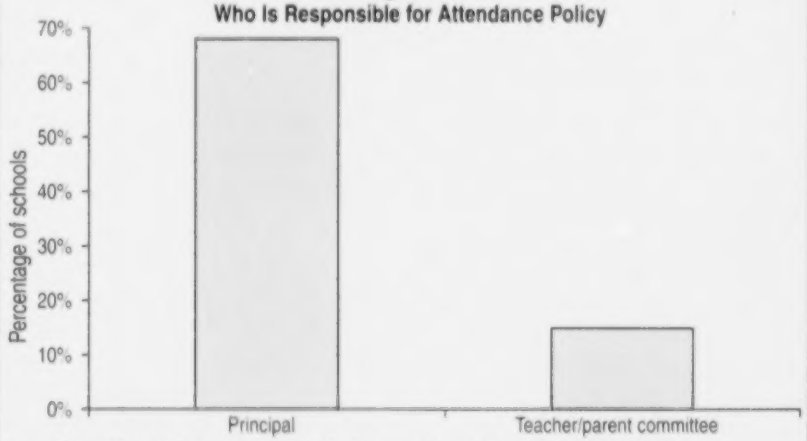
From grading, discipline, and attendance to selecting textbooks, principals have shared a wide range of responsibilities with their schools' teachers, parents, and community members who participate on the schools' governance boards. (See Figures 10-13.)

Charter school principals also reported increased participation and satisfaction on the part of their students. Student attendance improves remarkably when the student is enrolled in a charter school. Seventy-three percent of charter school principals said that average daily attendance is 95 percent. Sixty-three percent of school

principals reported that less than five percent of their students had left the school voluntarily. (See Figure 14.)

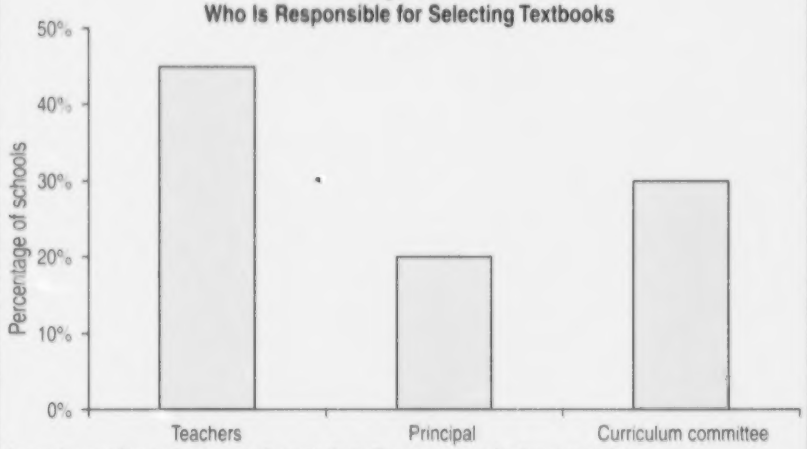
Finally, given the flexibility and increased opportunities to create a genuine learning environment, better employment opportunities for teachers, and increased parental involvement, it is not surprising that principals in California's charter schools are very satisfied with their schools and their position in them. Ninety-four percent of the principals surveyed by the Pacific Research Institute reported that they would return to their schools the following year.

Figure 12
Who Is Responsible for Attendance Policy



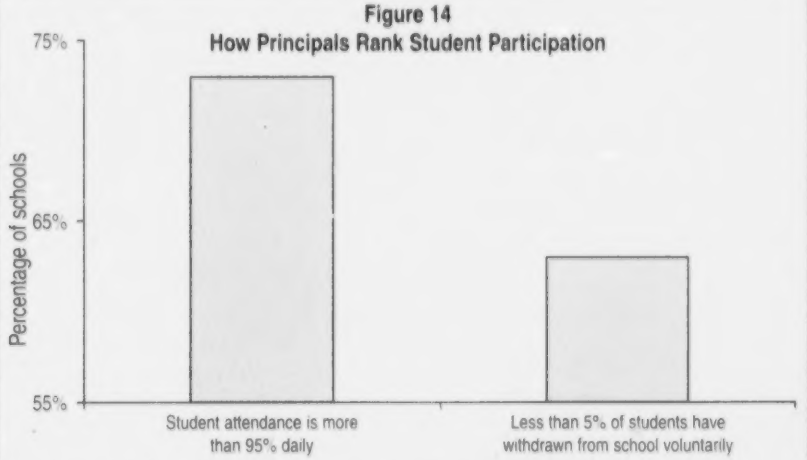
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 13
Who Is Responsible for Selecting Textbooks



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 14
How Principals Rank Student Participation



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

What Parents Say About Their Child's Charter School

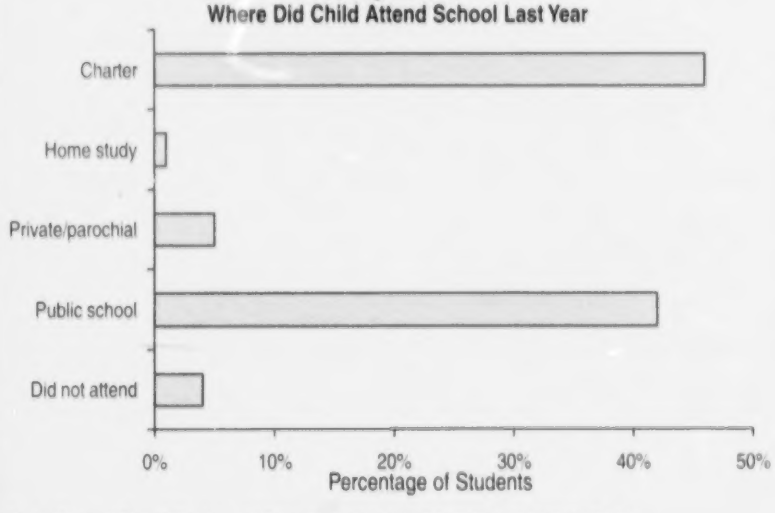
The growth of charter schools has spread in part because parents want the opportunity to choose the education they believe best suits their children and, as discussed above, charter schools are providing ample choices. Indeed, providing parental choice, in addition to improving pupil achievement, is the stated purpose of almost all of the nation's charter school laws.[25]

From 1991, when the first charter school opened its doors in Minnesota, opponents have challenged parental choice and the charter school idea on several grounds. Charter school critics charge that charter schools will attract unusually motivated parents and only academically talented students; charter schools will attract students from private schools and drain public school funds; and charter schools will serve students from predominantly white or wealthy families. Charter schools, say opponents, will "cream" parents as well as students.

PRI's survey, and other studies cited here, refute those charges. Instead of simply attracting already motivated parents, charter schools appear to "have the ability to motivate parents to participate and students to have a greater interest in learning and academic achievement."[26] In particular, surveys of parents with children enrolled in charter schools in California, as well as Arizona and Massachusetts, pronounce charter schools a great success.

When PRI asked California's charter school parents what school their child attended last year, 88 percent reported that their child attended either a charter or public school. (See Figure 15.) Several studies report that charter schools are attracting students from the private sector back into the public school system. In Massachusetts, 18 percent of charter school students previously attended a private or parochial school.[27] The Hudson Institute study notes that nationwide six percent of parents who home schooled their children have enrolled students in charter home-study programs.[28]

Figure 15
Where Did Child Attend School Last Year



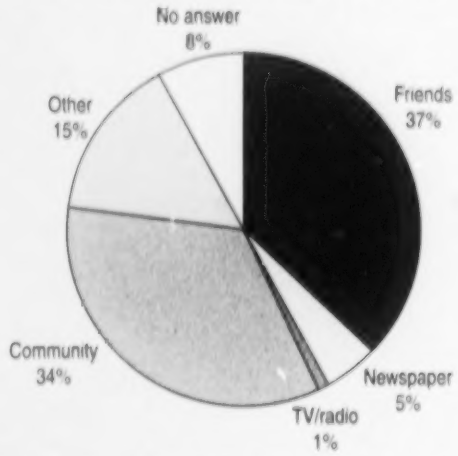
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

- **Charter schools have strong roots in their communities and are recommended by parents**

When PRI asked parents in California how they learned about their charter school, they overwhelmingly reported that the information came from another parent or from a member of their community. (See Figure 16.) Currently, most charter schools

report waiting lists of students. However, as the charter school idea expands and an increasing number of charter schools begin to compete for students, the schools may need to expand the marketing efforts necessary to reach their enrollment targets.

Figure 16
How Did Parents Learn about the Charter School



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

Charter schools and school choice are unfamiliar concepts to most parents and with charter schools accounting for less than one percent of schools across the nation, this is not surprising. A recent Public Agenda national survey of parents' attitudes about school choice finds that most Americans know very little about charter schools. Notes the study: "Even parents in areas with school choice policies in place are surprisingly unaware of the pros and cons of this [school choice] debate."[29] About 81 percent of the general public and 79 percent of parents with school-age children report they know little or nothing about charter schools.

Even in Arizona and Michigan, where charter schools are prevalent, Public Agenda found that a majority of parents was unacquainted with the issue. About half of parents "living in areas rich in charter schools still know very little or nothing about them. Two-thirds of Arizona and Michigan parents say they need to learn more about charter schools to have an opinion about them."[30]

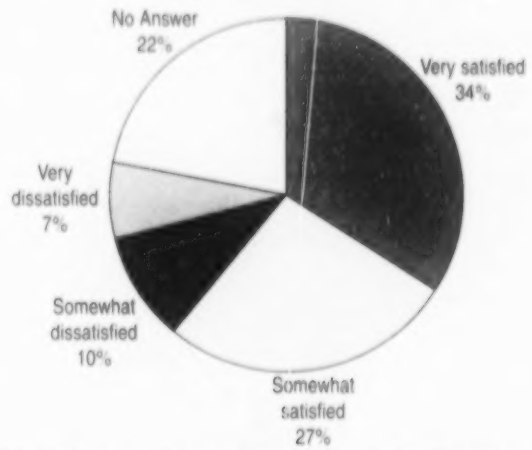
If charter schools are to fulfill their mission of providing choice to *all* parents and if charter schools are to become full partners in the public school system, their numbers must be allowed to increase. Otherwise, there is danger the public will continue to be unaware or consider charter schools merely "boutique" schools.

If charter schools are to fulfill their mission of providing choice to all parents and if charter schools are to become full partners in the public school system, their numbers must be allowed to increase.

- **Charter school parents rank the charter school experience very favorably compared to experience in schools where their students were previously enrolled**

Among parents who know about them, charter schools are popular. In Massachusetts, 81 percent of parents report that their charter school experience is superior to that in their previous school.[31] The Hudson Institute reported that when parents were asked to rate their child's charter school experience against other options, "they ranked the charter schools higher on every single indicator." According to the Hudson study, charter school parents especially

Figure 17
California Parents' Satisfaction with Previous School



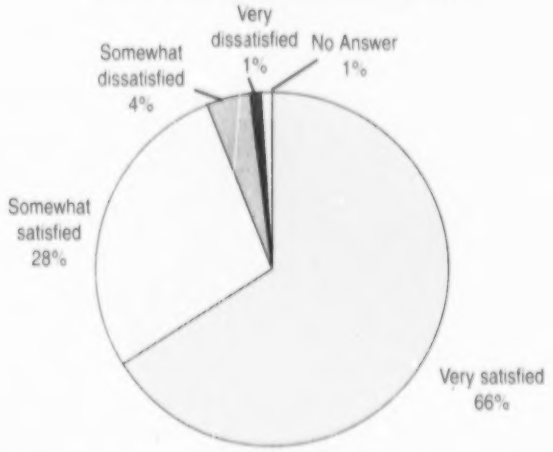
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

appreciated the "individual attention and class/school size" offered by charter schools.[32]

- **Parents report a high level of satisfaction with their child's experience in the charter school**

PRI found that nearly 17 percent of California parents surveyed were very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with their child's previous school. (See Figure 17.) But parents' satisfaction levels rose when they enrolled their child in a charter school. When PRI asked parents to rate their satisfaction with their child's charter school, only five percent of charter school parents said they are dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied, and 94 percent said they are very or somewhat satisfied. (See Figure 18.) The Hudson Institute surveyed parents on specific aspects of charter schools and found that "most of the top answers (class size, curriculum, school size, individual attention by teachers, academic standards for students) are education related. Parents, overall, seem remarkably pleased with most aspects of their child's charter school."[33] More than 75 percent of Massachusetts parents with students in a charter school ranked the quality of the educational program as excellent; 70 percent praised the school's responsiveness to parents; and more than 60 percent ranked the ability to motivate parents and the quality of the staff as excellent.[34]

Figure 18
Parental Satisfaction with Charter School



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

- **Parents enroll children in charter schools primarily for academic reasons**

In Massachusetts, 77 percent of parents say that the educational program is better than the educational program at their previous school.[35] The Hudson Institute reported that when parents are asked why they enrolled their child in a charter school, "two conclusions stand out: first, there is striking (and, to us, unsurprising) consistency among income levels that parents are looking for small

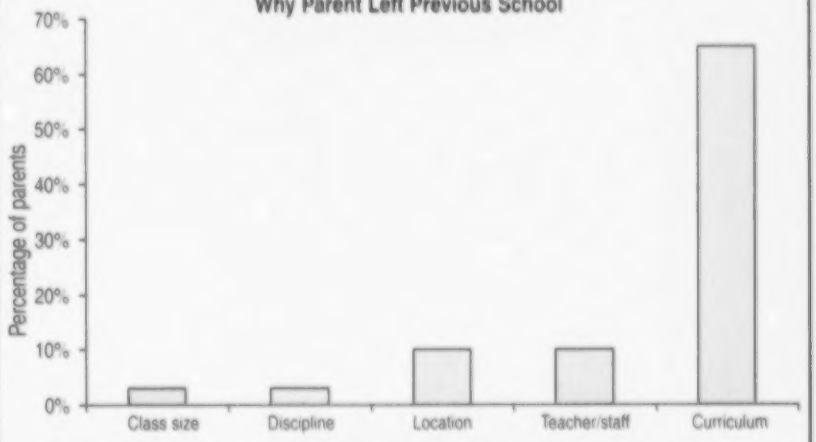
schools and small classes and that many feel that their child's special needs were not being met by their previous school; second, lower income parents were more apt to be concerned about safety and weak student performance."[36]

When asked why they left their previous school and why they enrolled their child in a charter school, California parents surveyed by PRI matched the national sample provided by the Hudson Institute study. Overall, parents selected the school's curriculum as their number one reason for selecting a charter. The second most cited reason was the attitude of teachers and staff. (See Figures 19 and 20.)

- **When asked to grade their student's charter school performance, most parents award an "A"**

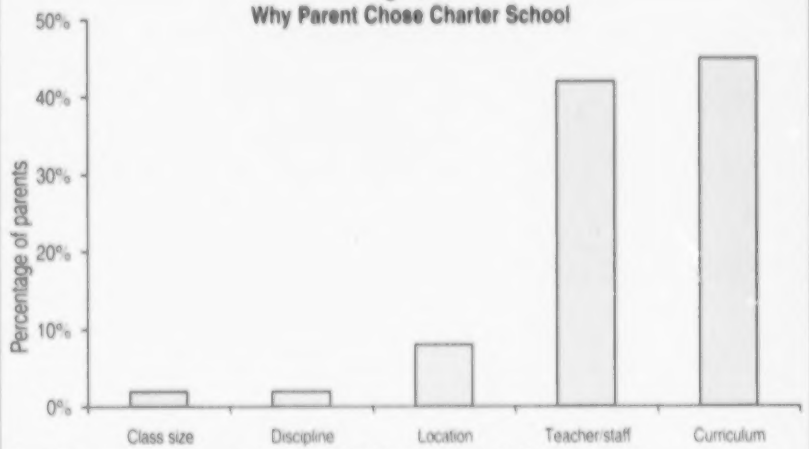
When PRI asked California parents to grade the performance of their child's charter school, the parents graded very high. Fifty-three percent awarded the school an "A". (See Figure 21.) These high levels of satisfaction were further refined when PRI asked additional questions about why the parent enrolled the student in the charter school, how the child was achieving previously, and whether the parents would enroll their

Figure 19
Why Parent Left Previous School



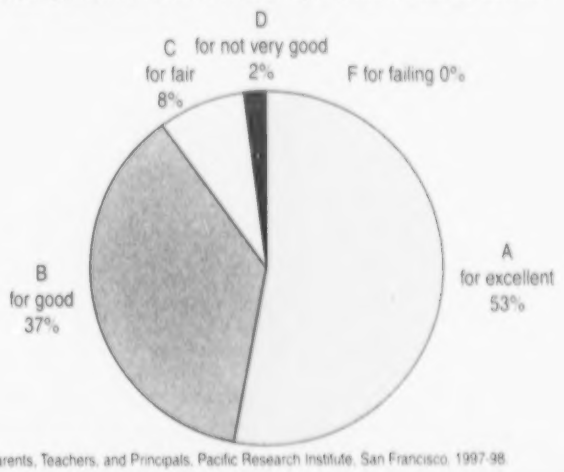
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

Figure 20
Why Parent Chose Charter School



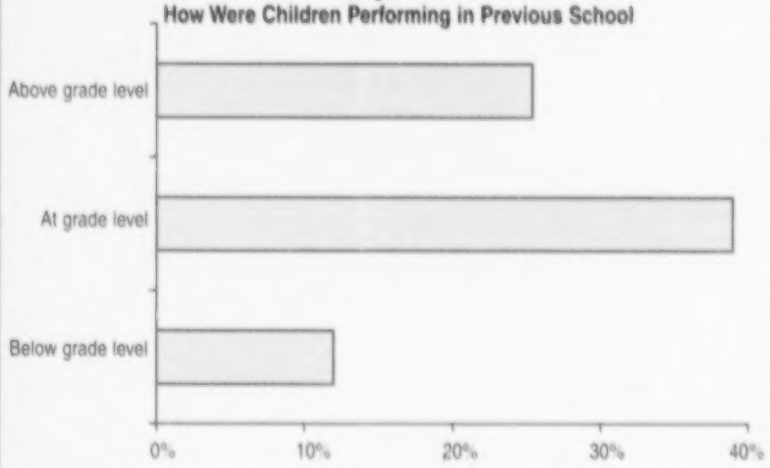
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

Figure 21
How California Parents Grade Their Child's Charter School



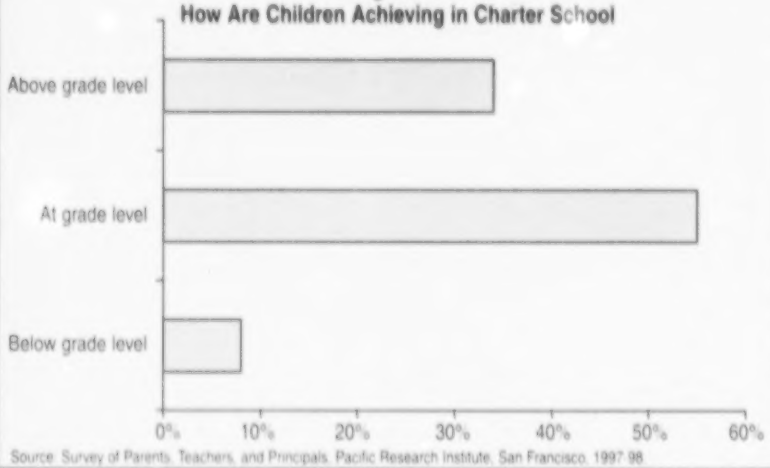
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

Figure 22
How Were Children Performing in Previous School



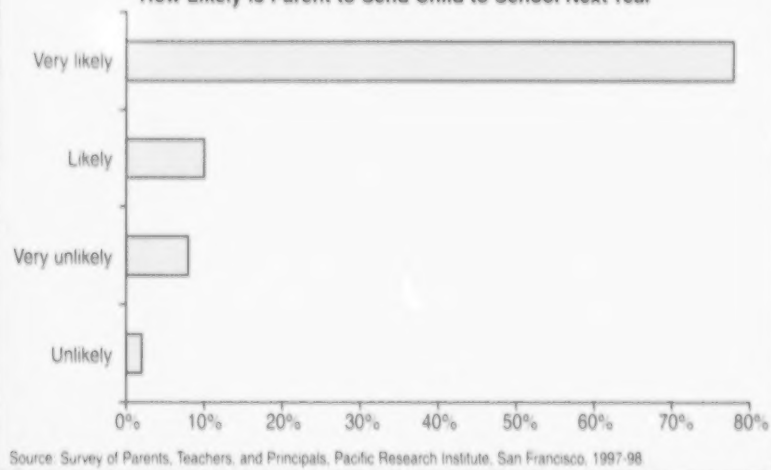
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

Figure 23
How Are Children Achieving in Charter School



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

Figure 24
How Likely Is Parent to Send Child to School Next Year



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98

child in the charter school the following year.

- **Parents say academic performance improves when students enroll in a charter school**

The Hudson Institute reports that nationwide, among students performing "poorly" in their previous school (as judged by their parents), "nearly half are now doing 'excellent' or 'above average' work. The number of students doing 'excellent' or 'good' work rose 23.4 percent for African-Americans and 21.8 percent for Hispanics after enrolling in charter schools."[37] Less than half of Massachusetts's parents (45 percent) reported that their child's academic performance was above average in the previous school. The Massachusetts study also reported that "available results from standardized tests administered to incoming charter school students confirm that prior academic achievement was unremarkable."[38]

When PRI asked parents to compare their child's performance with the school previously attended, 12 percent reported their child performed below level, while only 24 percent of parents reported above grade-level performance. In contrast, 34 percent of parents reported that their children were performing above grade level in the charter school. (See Figures 22 and 23.)

Overall, parents are providing an early answer to the question of whether charter schools improve academic performance. When asked whether they would enroll their child in the same charter school next year, an overwhelming 90 percent of California parents said yes. Only eight percent of California parents said they were "very unlikely" to enroll their child next year. (See Figure 24.)

What Teachers Say About Charter Schools

Opponents of charter schools charge that teachers will lose job security and other benefits if they accept employment in charter schools. Charter schools, critics say, will hire inferior teachers. While these criticisms stem primarily from teachers' unions, teachers in charter schools tell a different story.

Milo Cutter is a member of the National Education Association and director of one of the first and most successful charter schools, in St. Paul, Minnesota. During the 1991 debate on that state's charter-school legislation, a union official told Cutter that the Minnesota Education Association was "not opposed to our concept but they were opposed to charter schools."[39] Throughout the nation, innovative teachers such as Milo Cutter have started charter schools. And the majority of teachers in charter schools report enormous satisfaction with their teaching experience.

The majority of teachers in charter schools report enormous satisfaction with their teaching experience.

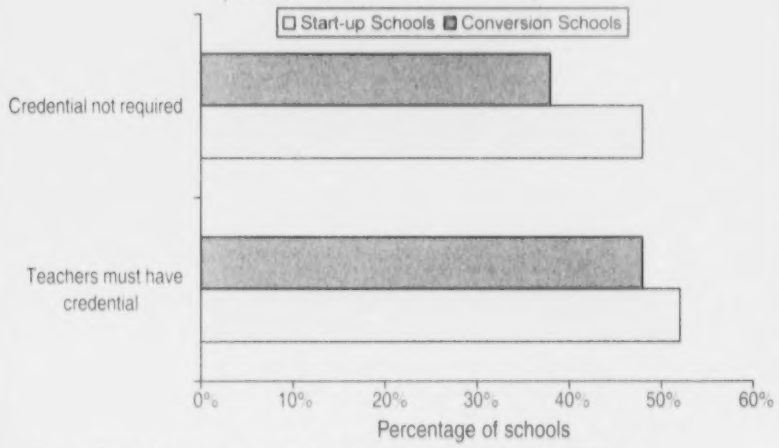
- **Charter school teachers are qualified**

In the public school system, whether a teacher is "qualified" to teach usually is determined by the type of license or credential he or she possesses. In education jargon, teachers are referred to as "certified persons." Yet common sense, backed by many studies, confirms that possession of a credential alone does not equip anyone to teach at an acceptable level of performance. More important, experts say, is whether the teacher possesses an academic degree in the subject being taught, has mastered the subject matter, and is able to convey it to students in an understandable manner. A Rand Corporation study found that there is a positive correlation between the amount of coursework and preparation of teachers in science and mathematics and the level of student learning in those fields.[40] According to PRI's *California Index of Leading Education Indicators*, only 39 percent of California's math teachers had actually majored in mathematics.[41]

Charter legislation frees charter schools from many state regulations, but teacher certification is one area in which the state laws vary in terms of how much freedom they allow charter schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education study, more than half of the charter states require charter schools to hire certified staff. In the other states, charter schools are free to hire non-certified teachers; as a result, they hire at least 10 percent fewer certified teachers than all public schools in those states.[42]

In 1997-98, while PRI was conducting its survey of California charter schools and teachers, the state's charter school law did not require teachers to possess a state teaching credential. Charter schools took advantage of the law and hired staff that fit the needs of their program. Forty-three percent of California's charter schools did not require every teacher to be certified. Moreover, start-up

Figure 25
School Teacher Credential Policy



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

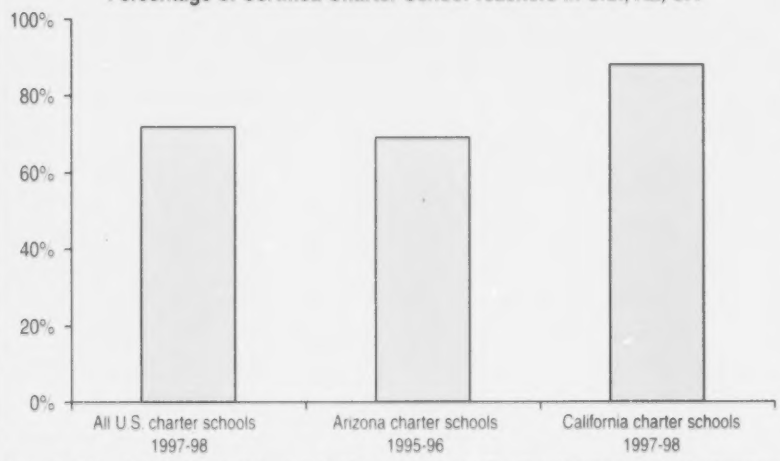
schools, required to hire an entirely new staff, were ten percent more likely not to require a credential than existing public schools that converted. (See Figure 25.)

The number of charter teachers surveyed by Pacific Research Institute who reported being certified to teach in California totaled 88 percent. This exceeds the national average of 72 percent. In part, this is explained because California has a higher proportion of charter schools that were pre-existing schools. For instance, the number of certified teachers in Arizona, where most of the charter schools are newly created, totals 69 percent. (See Figure 26.)

California's charter law was amended in 1998 to require teachers in charter schools to possess a credential or other document issued by the state's Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). On January 1, 1999, when the law took effect, the CTC issued all charter teachers not possessing a state credential an emergency credential lasting through June 1999. It is too early to assess the impact of the change in law on California's charter school teaching force. However, charter schools have lost a large amount of flexibility in their effort to hire qualified people.

Just as the education level of charter school teachers may vary greatly, charter schools seek individuals with a wide range of professional qualifications. Unlike their counterpart public schools, charter schools have used the talents of individuals from all walks of life. At the San Carlos charter school, the first school to be chartered in California, teachers are as likely to possess a Ph.D. in physics from Stanford University as they are a state-issued teaching credential. PRI's survey of the education level of teachers in California found a relatively large number of teachers who possess technical, vocational, or other professional degrees. (See Figure 27.)

Figure 26
Percentage of Certified Charter School Teachers in U.S., AZ, CA



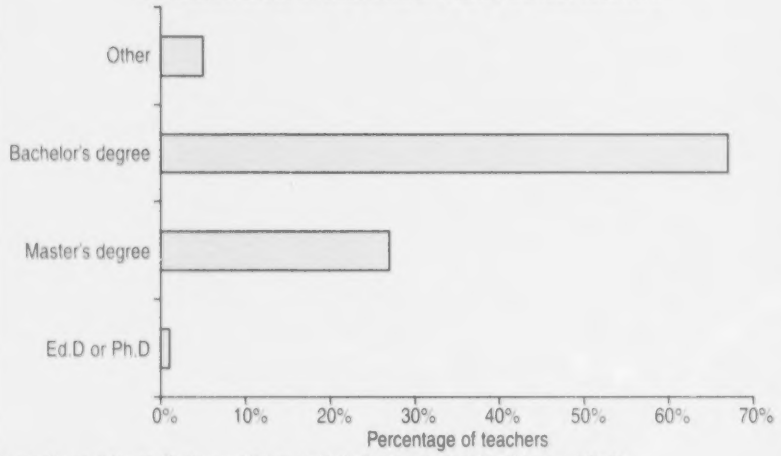
Source: *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education; Mary Gifford and Timothy Keller, *Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Teachers*, Phoenix, AZ, Goldwater Institute, August 1996.

- **Charter school teachers are more likely to bring experience outside of teaching to the charter school**

Nationwide and in California, more than 60 percent of charter school teachers taught in a regular public school or another charter school in the year immediately prior to the year they were surveyed. A substantial number of California's charter school teachers (eight percent) were first-year teachers. Ten percent came from a private school and eight percent from another field altogether. (See Figure 28.)

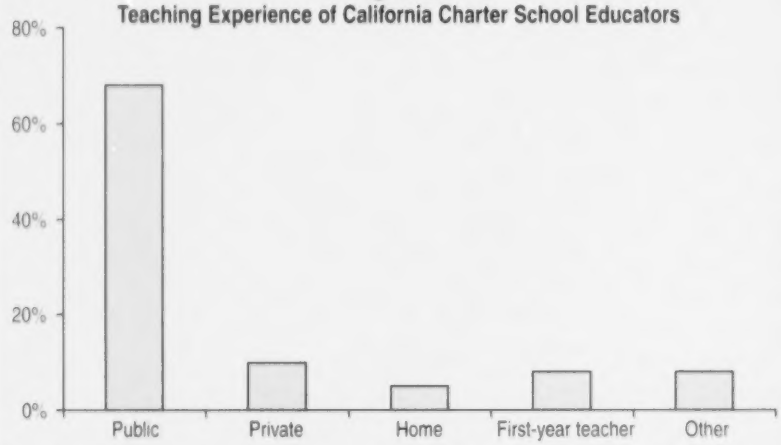
Of the teachers coming from another field, PRI found that 30 percent had worked in other areas of the public sector, such as the military or Peace Corps, and 37 percent had been in the private sector. Seventeen percent had owned or operated a business. (See Figure 29.) The Hudson Institute reports that charter school teachers are "an unconventional bunch." More than a quarter of teachers surveyed in the Hudson study said that they would be doing something other than teaching if they weren't teaching in a charter school. This indicates, note the authors of the Hudson study, that charter schools are "tapping into sources of instructional horsepower not attracted to more conventional schools."[43]

Figure 27
Education Level of California's Charter School Teachers



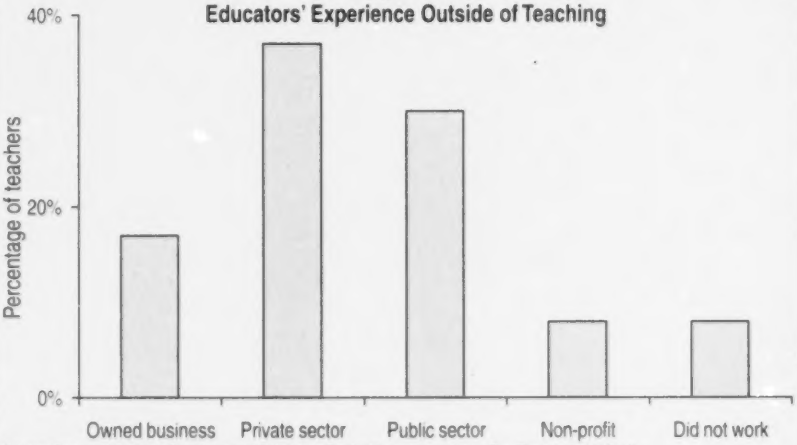
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 28
Teaching Experience of California Charter School Educators



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 29
Educators' Experience Outside of Teaching



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

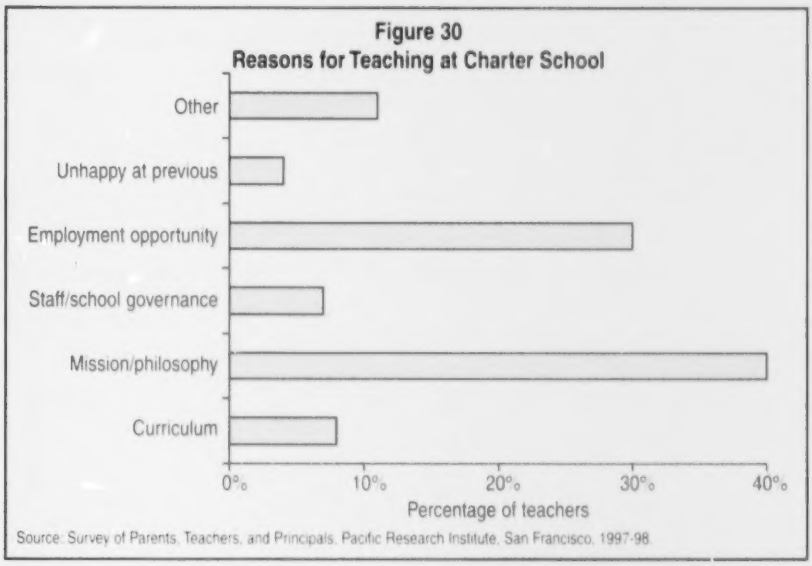


Figure 30
Reasons for Teaching at Charter School

Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals. Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

- **Teachers choose the charter school primarily because of the school's mission and/or philosophy**

No matter where they taught or worked before, California's charter school teachers cite the school's mission/philosophy as the top reason they chose to apply. (See Figure 30.) The Hudson Institute reports that charter school teachers nationwide appear "more interested in educational quality and professional/opportunities than salary and convenience."[44]

- **Teacher salaries are the same or higher in charter schools as they are in counterpart public schools**

A majority of charter school teachers surveyed in California and Arizona reported that their salaries and benefits met or exceeded those of their previous positions.[45] Nationwide, 35 percent of charter school teachers reported that they make more money than they would in another school, compared to 28 percent who say they make about the same, and 37 percent who say they make less.[46]

- **Charter school teachers are less likely to be union members**

Most public schools are governed by collective bargaining agreements negotiated between the school district and a teacher union. School staff have very little input into the terms of these agreements. Charter schools, on the other hand, have the flexibility to seek a waiver from the district agreement or not to be covered by the agreement at all.

Nationwide, the Hudson Institute reports that only 24 percent of charter school teachers are members of a teacher union. In contrast, 46 percent of California charter school teachers responding to PRI's survey said they were members of a union. PRI's survey also found that 58 percent of the state's charter schools were covered by their district's collective bargaining agreement. In part, California's larger percentage of union membership is explained by the state's higher proportion of charter schools that were pre-existing schools. Whether the school is newly created or a converted existing public school makes a difference. Only 52 percent of start-up schools are covered by a district bargaining agreement. In contrast, 95 percent of converted schools remain under the district's bargaining agreement. (See Figure 31.) However, most of the schools have gained

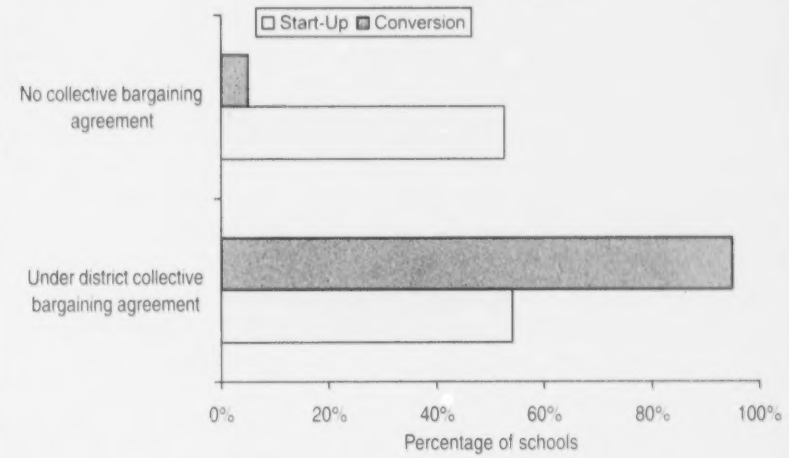
sufficient waivers to hire teachers at the school site and to negotiate terms of employment.

- **Charter school teachers are hired by their schools on a contractual basis not by a school district under collective bargaining rules.**

Most charter school teachers are hired on a contract basis. The duration of most teacher contracts nationwide are for one school year (10 to 12 months). In California, where many teacher contracts are negotiated by a union, 22 percent of the teachers have a multi-year contract. (Figure 32.) In Arizona, a "right-to-work" state, very few teachers have a multi-year contract and a large number, 17 percent, work "at will" or without a contract.[47]

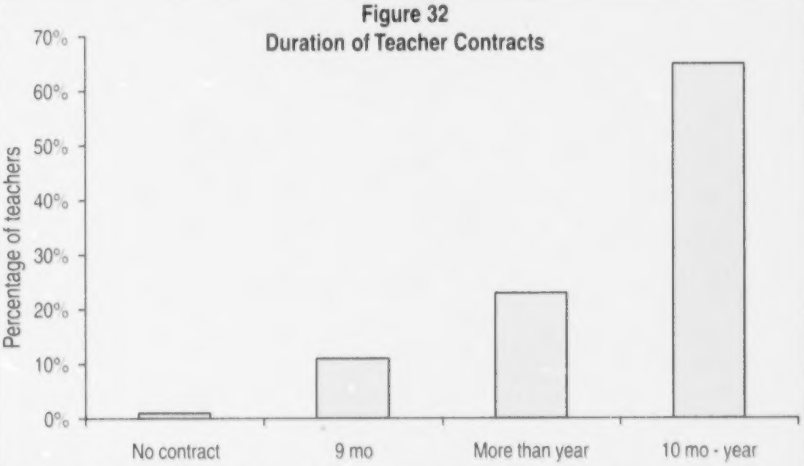
In most public school districts, contracts are negotiated between the school district's board of trustees, a team of administrators, and union negotiators. California's charter school principals and directors have much more power to negotiate school contracts. PRI's survey found that 60 percent of school principals negotiate the contract with their teachers. (See Figure 33.) Accounted for perhaps by the small size and teaching staff in most charter schools, 30 percent of teachers in California report the

Figure 31
Charter Schools and Collective Bargaining



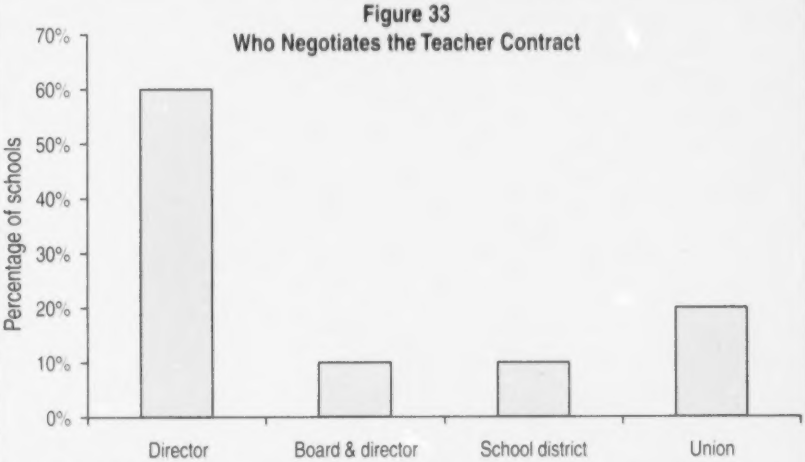
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 32
Duration of Teacher Contracts



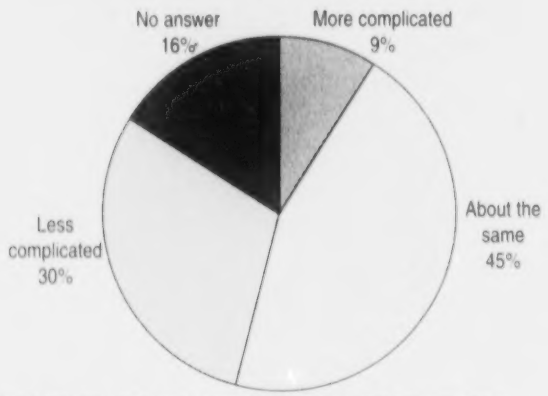
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 33
Who Negotiates the Teacher Contract



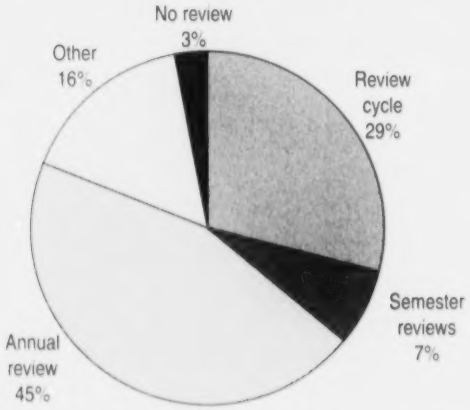
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 34
How Does Charter School Contract Process Compare to Last Teaching Position



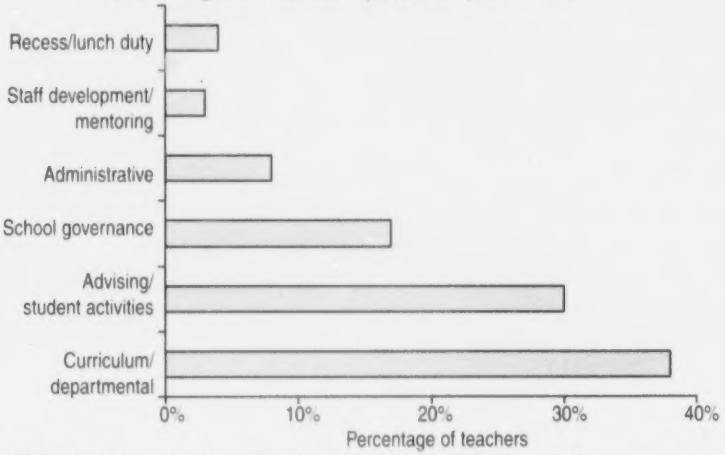
Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 35
Teacher Evaluation Process



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

Figure 36
School Organization/Development Responsibilities



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

contract process is less complicated in their charter school than in their previous position. (See Figure 34.)

Finally, charter school teachers are held accountable through an evaluation process: 97 percent of teachers in California are subject to some evaluation, the majority on an annual basis. (See Figure 35.)

- **Charter school teachers share a wide variety of responsibilities outside of the classroom**

According to the Hudson Institute's national study, charter schools offer a great deal to America's teachers, including "professional and entrepreneurial opportunities and more chances to be involved with school policy-making and planning." Nationwide, 61 percent of charter school teachers rank the opportunity to participate in school decision-making as one of the largest factors in the success of the charter school.[48]

In California, PRI found that a significant number of teachers, 70 percent, spend time every week on school organization and development duties, ranging from serving on departmental and curriculum committees and governance councils to sponsoring student events. (See Figure 36.)

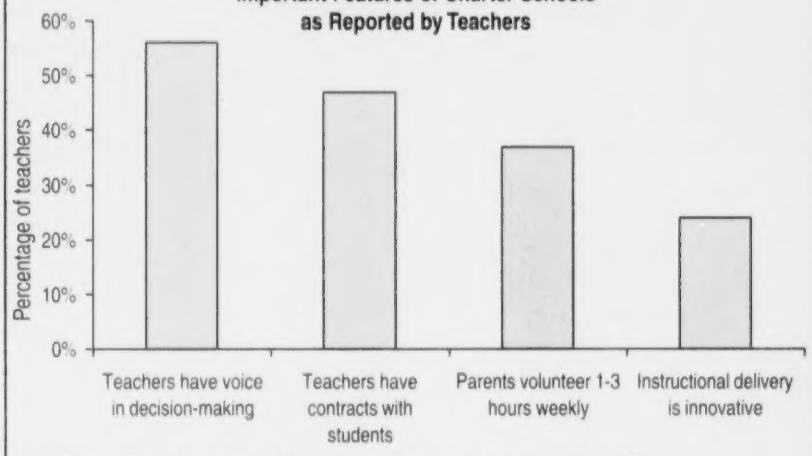
- **Charter school teachers are innovative in the teacher/student/parent relationship and in how they teach**

PRI's survey found that California charter school teachers rank several features found in their schools very high, including an increased voice in decision-mak-

ing, the ability to have contracts with students, more parent volunteers, and innovative instructional delivery. (See Figure 37.)

Forty-seven percent of California's charter school teachers use contracts with students to accomplish their educational goals. These range from academic to attendance contracts. While widely used in private and parochial schools, student-teacher contracts are rare in the public school system and prohibited in some states.

Figure 37
Important Features of Charter Schools as Reported by Teachers



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

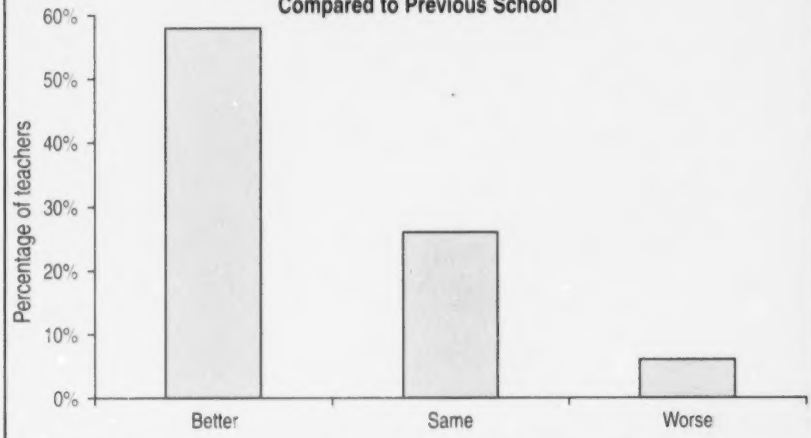
Instructional delivery methods, whether they take place in a classroom or non-classroom setting, vary widely from school to school. Independent study, distance learning, and home study are much more popular in California than in most states. Almost one-fourth of California's charter schools use these innovative delivery methods.

Most experts note that parental involvement is vital for student success, and research demonstrates a direct correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. While school volunteers are but one measure of parental involvement (frequent parent-teacher meetings being another), charter schools do rely on parent and community volunteers. Sixty-five percent of teachers in California deploy parent volunteers in the classroom. The largest number of parents volunteer one to three hours weekly.

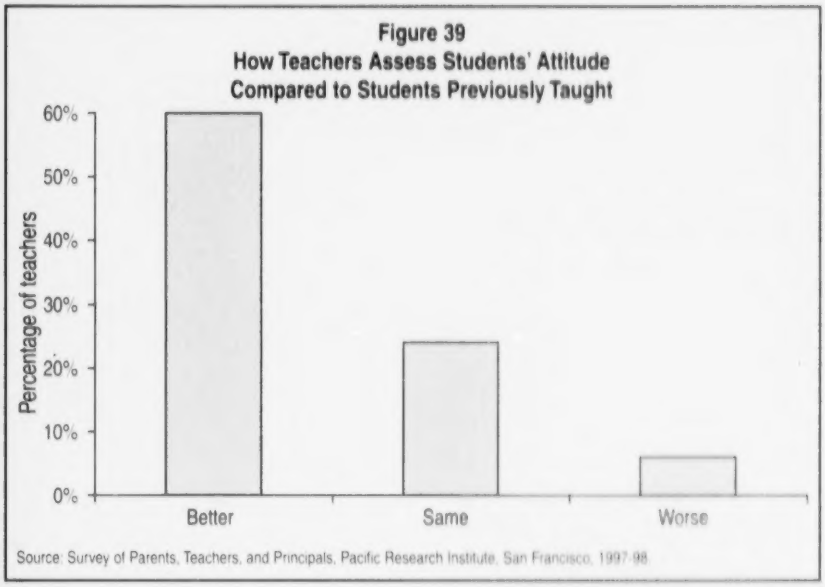
- **Charter school teachers are popular with their students**

Whether the cause is enthusiasm for the charter school experience or an attendance contract, attendance is running at high levels in charter schools. PRI found that 58 percent of California teachers report that student attendance is much better in the charter school than in the

Figure 38
How Teachers Assess Student Attendance Compared to Previous School



Source: Survey of Parents, Teachers, and Principals, Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, 1997-98.

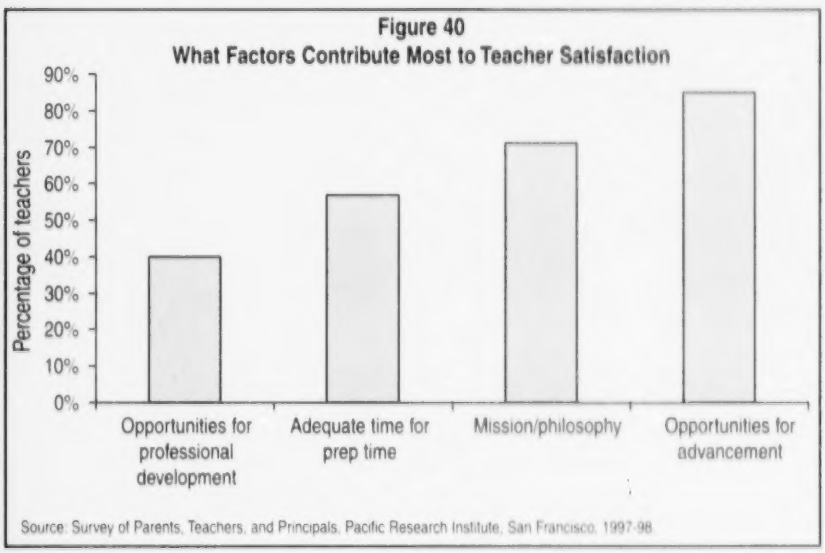


school where the teacher previously taught. (See Figure 38.)

Three-fifths of students nationwide report that their charter school teachers are better than the teachers in their previous school.[49] And the students' rapport with their teachers is noticed. In California, 60 percent of teachers report a better attitude. (See Figure 39.)

- **Teachers are satisfied with the charter school experience**

The Hudson Institute's national survey of charter school teachers concludes that they, like parents, are seeking out charter schools primarily for educational reasons: "high academic standards, small classes, a focus on teaching and learning, educational philosophies that match their own, and innovative approaches to instruction."[50] According to the Hudson Institute, 77 percent of teachers chose charter schools for educational philosophy, 65 percent wanted a new school, 63 percent sought like-minded colleagues, 55 percent wanted good administrators, and for 55 percent, class size was important. PRI's results in California mirror the Hudson study.



Seventy-one percent of teachers surveyed in California reported that they are very satisfied with the school's philosophy and mission; 40 percent that they are very or somewhat satisfied with opportunities for professional development; and 85 percent credit the charter school for providing opportunities for advancement. Fifty-seven percent said their school allots adequate time in the school week for staff preparation time. (See Figure 40.)

Conclusion: Charter Schools and the Quest for Parental Choice

Overall, charter schools are a rare educational success story that closely follows the portrait of their innovative supporters. As PRI's survey makes clear, that story refutes the persistent charges of their critics.

It is no longer possible to take seriously the claim that charter schools are bastions of white flight and affluent suburbia, a vision stubbornly tendered by opponents. With minorities making up approximately half of charter school students nationwide, this type of charge may now find its proper targets in the regular government schools, which in many cases have fewer minorities than charter schools.

Contrary to baleful and endlessly repeated claims, charter schools do not "cream" the best and brightest, leaving the lower-achieving students behind. Rather, they serve a broad range of students and enjoy widespread support where government schools are failing. Families put students' names on waiting lists because they believe the charter school will improve their children's achievement.

The responses also confirm that neither do charter schools cream the most motivated parents. Indeed, the results show that charter schools prompt many parents to take a more active role in the education of their child. This survey should also end forever one of the education establishment's favorite slanders, the insulting notion that parents, particularly minority and low-income parents, are incapable of assessing the needs of their own children.

Contrary to what many charge, charter schools employ teachers of high quality, whether "certified" or not. Those teachers are, on the whole, pleased with their experience in charter schools, where the labor strife so typical of government education is notably absent. As UC Berkeley law Professor John Coons, co-author of PRI's *Making School Choice Work for All Families*,[51] recently noted, teachers cannot be true professionals if their clients are captive. For true professionalism, Coons says, "they must be free."[52]

Charter schools offer that freedom of choice, enhancing teacher professionalism in the process. It remains for critics to produce a study showing widespread dissatisfaction with charter schools on the part of parents, teachers, and principals.

Charter schools have achieved this level of parent and teacher satisfaction, it should be noted, with fewer resources than conventional schools. They have also achieved success in the face of direct opposition and "false friends" in the education establishment. Other factors not directly evident in this study must be kept in mind.

While they remain public schools, charter schools stand apart from their counterparts in one key area. Failing public schools draw increased funding, whether or not that spending translates into improvement. By sharp contrast, if charter schools do not perform well, they will be shut down. That measure of accountability surely plays a large role in cultivating the performance that pleases so many parents. Charter schools are also different from other schools in a more fundamental way.

In the conventional government system of education, bureaucrats and administrators dictate the schools that students will attend. By contrast, no one at any level is forced to be part of a charter school. Indeed, to participate in a charter school requires a choice on the part of parents, students, and staff alike. These groups are content with their choices and willing to live with their consequences. Therein lies a strategic lesson for the future of education in California and across the nation.

America's system of government education has often been compared to Soviet agriculture, a perpetual failure on a grand scale. Faced with that failure, the Soviet authorities allowed citizens to cultivate small private plots. These plots flourished and wound up feeding a sizable portion of the populace. Charter schools are the American educational equivalent of those private plots.

Within the limitations of their enabling legislation, and in the face of reactionary opposition, charter schools prove that choice, increased freedom, and autonomy are the pathway to increased achievement and the only truly progressive policy. Charter schools confirm that the answer to problems posed by a monopoly is not to increase the power of the monopoly but to take it away. That may be accomplished by extending the principle of choice, the backbone of American democracy and the flywheel of American prosperity, to education.

Those policymakers who seek increased achievement, and who claim to have the best interests of students at heart, may follow the logic of this movement by increasing freedom and choice, and by refusing to turn back the clock to the days of regulation and regimentation. Increasing the number of charter schools is surely part of the answer, but only part.

Charter schools have shown staying power despite being part of a system often hostile to their very existence. The evidence from cities such as Milwaukee, where school-choice programs exist, is that charter schools would thrive even more in a free system where all parents enjoyed the ability to choose, as a matter of right, the education their children receive.

When that system arrives, and many reformers and civil-rights advocates are confident that the arrival will be sooner rather than later, charter schools can take part of the credit. In the meantime, as this survey shows, charter schools are doing a far better job at satisfying their primary constituents than an education establishment that enjoys monopoly power, captive clients, and guaranteed funding.

End Notes

1 See K. Lloyd Billingsley and Pamela A. Riley, *Expanding the Charter School Idea: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform*, San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, September 1999.
2 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 2.
3 Bruce Fuller, Elizabeth Burr, Luis Huerta, Susan Puryear, and Edward Wexler, *School Choice: Abundant Hopes, Scarce Evidence of Results*, Berkeley and Stanford, CA, Policy Analysis for California Education, September, 1999, p. 17.
4 *Children First America* (newsletter), Bentonville, AK, CEO America, October 1999.
5 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 2.
6 Robert Maranto and Scott Milliman, "In Arizona, Charter Schools Work," *Washington Post*, October 11, 1999.
7 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 1.
8 K. Lloyd Billingsley and Pamela A. Riley, *Expanding the Charter School Idea: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform*, San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, September 1999, p. 73.
9 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 3.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
11 Unpublished telephone survey of California charter schools, San Carlos, CA, California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC), 1999.
12 Alexander Volokh, "School Choice Could Alleviate Violence," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 1999.
13 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 7.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
15 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I*, Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 8.
16 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 8.
17 *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles*, Boston, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997, p. 2.
18 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I*, Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 8.
19 *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles*, Boston, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997, p. 2.
20 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 9.
21 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I*, Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 10.
22 Matthew Robinson, "Catering to Student Needs," *Investor's Business Daily*, January 23, 1998.
23 Joseph Garcia, "State's First Charter School Opens Door in Irving," *Dallas Morning News*, August 13, 1996.
24 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 5.
25 K. Lloyd Billingsley and Pamela A. Riley, *Expanding the Charter School Idea: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform*, San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, September 1999, p. 73.
26 *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles*, Boston, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997, p. 2.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

28 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Final Report," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part V,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 3.

29 Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Anthony Foleno, *On Thin Ice: How Advocates and Opponents Could Misread the Public's Views on Vouchers and Charter Schools,* New York, Public Agenda, 1999, p. 9.

30 *Ibid.* p. 11.

31 *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles,* Boston, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997, p. 2.

32 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 4.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles,* Boston, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997, p. 2.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

36 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Final Report," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part V,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 5.

37 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 1.

38 *Massachusetts Charter School Profiles,* Boston, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, October 1997, p. 2.

39 Gregg Vanourek, Bruno Manno, and Chester Finn, "The False Friends of Charter Schools," *Education Week,* April 30, 1997.

40 R. Shavelson, L. McDonnell, J. Oakes, and N. Casey, *Indicator Systems for Monitoring Mathematics and Science Education,* Santa Monica, CA, Rand Corporation, 1999.

41 Lance T. Izumi, *California Index of Leading Education Indicators,* San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, February 1997, p. 42.

42 *The State of Charter Schools: National Study of Charter Schools: Third-Year Report,* Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, May 1999, p. 7.

43 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 6-7.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

45 Arizona survey data from Mary Gifford and Timothy Keller, *Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Teachers,* Phoenix, AZ, Goldwater Institute, August 1996, p. 9-10.

46 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 7.

47 Mary Gifford and Timothy Keller, *Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Teachers,* Phoenix, AZ, Goldwater Institute, August 1996, p.11, and unpublished survey data from Pacific Research Institute, 1997-98, p. 33.

48 Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, Louann A. Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, "Charter Schools As Seen by Those Who Know Them Best: Students, Teachers, and Parents," *Charter Schools in Action Project, Part I,* Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, June 1997, p. 6.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

51 John E. Coons and Stephen D. Sugarman, *Making School Choice Work for All Families: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform,* San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, April 1999.

52 John Coons, speaking at "Legislating for Educational Opportunity," a Pacific Research Institute briefing at the State Capitol, Sacramento, California, November 16, 1999.

APPENDIX A:
Survey of California Charter School Parents, Teachers, and Principals, 1997-98

From 1997 through 1998, the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy (PRI) conducted three surveys to assess the attitudes of charter school parents, teachers, and principals towards the current status of charter schools and related issues. The total sample included all of the 100 charter schools in California that had been open the previous year. These schools enrolled 41,531 students.

The Pacific Research Institute began its survey by contacting each of the 100 schools to determine whether the school used a traditional classroom, independent, or home study program and whether the school was a start-up or converted existing public school. PRI also collected information on whether the school was using a district building and whether the school employees were represented by the district's employee unions. Based on the information received from contacting all the schools and on the school's geographic location, PRI produced a sample of teachers and parents (15,000) that completely matched the total sample. (See Tables 1-5 below.)

Surveys were then sent to all 100 school directors and a sample of 1,000 teachers and 15,000 parents (approximately 40 percent of the total sample). Four thousand of the parent surveys were translated into Spanish.

Table 1: Six State Regions

	Quota based on total sample	PRI's sample
Northern counties	16%	17%
Bay Area counties	5%	9%
Valley counties	24%	21%
Coastal counties	3%	2%
Los Angeles county	23%	21%
Southern counties	29%	30%

Table 2: Traditional Classroom Versus Alternative (Independent, Home, and Distance Learning)

	Quota based on total sample	PRI's sample
Classroom	76%	76%
Alternative	24%	24%

Table 3: Converted, Existing Public School Versus Start-up

	Quota based on total sample	PRI's sample
Conversion	53%	55%
Start-up	47%	45%

Table 4: Number of Families Surveyed (Based on Student Enrollment)

Six Regions	% of students	# of students	# of surveys sent
Northern counties	16%	6,484	2,400
Bay Area counties	5%	1,888	750
Valley counties	24%	9,965	3,600
Coastal counties	3%	1,397	450
Los Angeles county	23%	9,707	3,300
Southern counties	29%	12,090	4,500
TOTAL		41,531	15,000

Table 5: Charter Schools Surveyed (Listed by Region)

REGION/COUNTY	School	Enrollment
Northern Counties		
Placer	Placer High Charter School	1,650
El Dorado	Louisiana Schnell Elementary	515
Butte	Hearthstone School	384
Sonoma	Sonoma Valley Charter	225
Nevada	Yuba River Charter School	192
Placer	Sheridan Elementary School	170
Butte	Paradise Charter Middle School	100
Butte	Four Winds Education Program	94
Napa	River School Charter	65
Butte	Children's Community Charter School	60
Sonoma	Piner Olivet Charter School	58
Sonoma	Santa Rosa Charter School	43
Mendocino	Eel River School	35
Sonoma	County Charter School	18
Placer	Horizon Instructional Systems	1,300
El Dorado	Charter Community School	750
El Dorado	Rite of Passage School	300
Nevada	Ready Springs Charter School	252
Nevada	Grass Valley Charter School	68
Yuba	Yuba County Career Preparatory Charter	57
Nevada	Nevada City Home Study Charter	40
Shasta	Chrysalis Charter School	40
Nevada	Twin Ridges Home Study Charter	30
Butte	Home Tech	28
Nevada	Union Hill Charter School	10
	Subtotal Northern Counties	**6,484**
Bay Area Counties		
San Mateo	Garfield Charter School	650
San Francisco	International Studies Academy	540
Alameda	Oakland Charter School	182
Marin	Novato Charter School	138
San Mateo	San Carlos Charter Learning Center	135
Alameda	East Bay Conservation Corps	120
San Francisco	Creative Arts Charter School	48
Alameda	American Indian Charter School	40
Marin	Sobriety High School	35
	Subtotal Bay Area Counties	**1,888**

Table 5: Charter Schools Surveyed (Listed by Region) Continued

REGION/COUNTY	School	Enrollment
Valley Counties		
Sacramento	Folsom Middle School	950
Sacramento	Bowling Green Elementary	750
Tulare	Richgrove Elementary School	725
Merced	John C. Fremont Charter School	640
Fresno	Lincoln Elementary	616
Sacramento	Deterding Elementary School	608
Kings	Pioneer Middle	499
Fresno	Roosevelt Elementary	440
Fresno	Washington Elementary	433
Kings	Pioneer Primary	405
Fresno	Rafer Johnson Junior High	390
Sacramento	Westside Charter School	121
Fresno	West Park Charter Academy	118
Sacramento	Natomas	105
Tulare	Charter Oak School	40
Kern	Kern Workforce 2000 Academy Charter	785
Solano	Buckingham Charter School	725
Stanislaus	Hickman Home Study Charter	650
Kern	Community Learning Center	570
Stanislaus	Hart-Ransom Home Based Academic	180
Madera	Mountain Home School	87
Stanislaus	Oakdale Charter School	50
Kings	Mid Valley Alternative Charter School	18
Stanislaus	Keys to Learning Charter School	60
	Subtotal Valley Counties	**9,965**
Coastal Counties		
Santa Barbara	Peabody Charter School	727
Santa Cruz	Linscott Charter School	190
Santa Barbara	Santa Barbara Charter School	146
San Luis Obispo	Bellvue-Santa Fe Charter School	109
Santa Cruz	Charter School No. 25	175
Santa Cruz	Delta School	50
	Subtotal Coastal Counties	**1,397**
Los Angeles County		
Los Angeles	Palisades Charter School	2,430
Los Angeles	Fenton Avenue Charter School	1,200
Los Angeles	Paul Revere School	1,800
Los Angeles	Vaughn Next Century Learning Center	1,150
Los Angeles	Westwood Charter School	700
Los Angeles	Palisades Elementary Charter	466
Los Angeles	Open Charter School	384
Los Angeles	Kenter Canyon	340
Los Angeles	Topanga Elementary	330
Los Angeles	Canyon Elementary Charter School	301
Los Angeles	Marquez Charter School	301
Los Angeles	Constellation Community Charter Middle	130
Los Angeles	Temescal Canyoun High School	93
Los Angeles	Accelerated Charter School	82
	Subtotal Los Angeles County	**9,707**

Table 5: Charter Schools Surveyed (Listed by Region) Continued

REGION/COUNTY	School	Enrollment
Southern Counties		
San Diego	O'Farrell Community School	1,350
San Diego	Memorial Academy for Internat'l Baccalaureate	1,252
Orange	Santiago Middle School	950
San Diego	Discovery	770
San Diego	Mueller Elementary School	733
Riverside	Washington Charter School	728
San Diego	Guajome Park Academy	700
San Bernardino	Yucca Mesa Charter School	645
San Diego	Clear View Elementary Charter School	600
San Diego	Harriet Tubman Village School	240
San Diego	Vivian Banks Charter School	143
San Diego	School of Success Kindergarten Academy	110
Riverside	Temecula Learning Center	79
San Diego	Charter School of San Diego	940
San Bernardino	Excelsior Education Center	613
San Diego	Darnall E-Campus	550
San Bernardino	Cato School of Reason	546
San Bernardino	Options for Youth	512
Riverside	Choice 2000 On-Line School	160
San Diego	Escondido Charter High School	300
San Bernardino	Excelsior Academy Alternative Education	110
Riverside	Moreno Valley Community Learning Center	59
	Subtotal Southern Counties	**12,090**
	TOTAL ALL COUNTIES	**41,531**

Appendix B:
Charter School Principal/Director Survey

The following questions are designed to give us an idea of the types of charter schools throughout California. Your responses will be confidential and used solely for our analysis. Your completion of this survey is vital to our research. Please feel free to write in any additional information that will help us better understand the composition of your school.

School:
Name of individual completing survey:

1. **Which of the following best describes your current certification status?**
   A. certified in California B. certified in other states, but not California
   C. working on California certification D. not certified, not working on it

2. **What is your educational background?**
   A. Bachelor's Degree B. Master's Degree C. Ph.D. D. other: ___

3. **What was your previous employment?**
   A. principal of a public school B. principal of a private school
   C. business D. other: ___

4. **Will you return to the same charter school next year?**
   A. yes B. no

5. **What grade levels does your school serve?**
   A. pre-K to 6 B. 6 to 8 C. 9-12 D. other: ___

6. **How many students attend your school?**
   A. 0-50 B. 50-100 C. 100-150 D. 150-500
   E. 500-750 F. 750-1000 G. More than 1000

7. **Do you have a waiting list for students or teachers?**
   A. No B. Yes, for teachers C. Yes, for students D. Yes, for both

8. **How many days a year is your school in session?**
   A. 182 days B. year-round C. other: ___

9. **How do you deliver your instructional curriculum?**
   A. traditional classroom B. independent study C. home-based instruction
   D. distance learning/internet E. other: ___

10. **When do you deliver instructional curriculum? (Circle all that apply.)**
    A. traditional B. morning C. afternoon D. evening

11. **Does your school have multiple campuses?**
    A. yes B. no

12. **What kind of building does your school occupy?**
    A. public school B. private/parochial school C. office building
    D. retail space E. virtual F. none

13. **How many classrooms do you have?**
A. 0-5 B. 5-15 C. 15-25 D. more than 25

14. **Is there a formal parent organization at your school?**
A. yes B. no

15. **Do you have contracts with your students' parents?**
A. yes B. no

16. **How many members of your board are:**
A. parents of students: __ B. faculty members: __ C. business representatives: __
D. community representatives: ___ E. other: ___

17. **Who determines the discipline policy in your school?**
A. director B. teachers C. director/teacher committee
D. parent/teacher committee E. student/parent/teacher committee F: other: ___

18. **Who determines the grading policy in your school?**
A. director B. teachers C. director/teacher committee
D. parent/teacher committee E. student/parent/teacher committee F. other: ___

19. **Who determines the attendance policy in your school?**
A. director B. teachers C. director/teacher committee
D. parent/teacher committee E. student/parent/teacher committee F. other: ___

20. **Who selects the textbooks for the school?**
A. director B. teachers C. director/teacher committee
D. parent/teacher committee E. student/parent/teacher committee F. other: ___

21. **How many teachers provide instruction at your school?**
A. 0-5 B. 5-15 C. 15-25 D. more than 25

22. **Do you have full- or part-time classroom aides?**
A. yes, full-time B. yes, part-time C. No

23. **Are your teachers covered by the district's collective bargaining agreement(s)?**
A. yes B. no

24. **Who negotiates employment contracts with the teachers?**
A. school director B. board/council C. business manager D. other: ___

25. **What is the normal evaluation process for teachers in your school?**
A. review cycle B. semester C. annual review D. other: ___

26. **Who conducts the teacher evaluations?**
A. director B. director and teacher C. parents and students

Appendix C:
Charter School Parent Survey*

The following questions are designed to determine who is attending charter schools in California, why parents choose charter schools, and if the charter school programs are satisfying student needs. Your answers are confidential and will be used solely for our analysis. Your completion of this survey is vital to our research. Please feel free to write any additional information that will be helpful to our analysis.

1. **How did you learn about the charter school?**
   A. friends B. newspaper C. TV/radio D. community E. Other:

2. **How many children do you currently have enrolled in the charter school?**
   A. one B. two C. three or more

3. **What type of school did your child attend last year?**
   A. public B. parochial C. private D. home study E. did not attend school
   F. charter

4. **What is the primary reason you decided to enroll your child in the charter school?**
   A. location B. discipline C. class size D. teacher/staff attitudes
   E. curriculum F. other

5. **What is the primary reason your child left his/her previous school?**
   A. location B. discipline C. class size D. teacher/staff attitudes
   E. curriculum F. other

6. **How satisfied were you with your child's previous school?**
   A. very satisfied B. somewhat satisfied C. somewhat dissatisfied
   D. very dissatisfied

7. **How was your child academically performing at his/her previous school?**
   A. below grade level B. at grade level C. above grade level D. was not in school

8. **How is your child academically performing at the charter school?**
   A. below grade level B. at grade level C. above grade level

9. **How often do you volunteer at the charter school?**
   A. daily B. weekly C. monthly D. annually E. never F. other: ___

10. **How satisfied are you with your child's current charter school?**
    A. very satisfied B. somewhat satisfied C. somewhat dissatisfied
    D. very dissatisfied

11. **How likely are you to send your child to this charter school next year?**
    A. very likely B. somewhat likely C. somewhat unlikely D. very unlikely

* Note: 4000 of the surveys were translated into Spanish and sent to the schools, based on their report of how many Spanish-speaking families had enrolled students in the school.

12. **If you could grade the performance of your child's charter school, what grade would you give it?**
    A. an "A" for excellent B. a "B" for good C. a "C" for fair D. a "D" for not very good
    E. a "F" for failing

13. **What is your education background?**
    A. less than high school B. high school/GED C. vocational/technical school
    D. four year college E. graduate degree

14. **What is your approximately total annual household income?**
    A. below $5,000 B. $5,000-$20,000 C. $20,000-$35,000 D. $35,000-$50,000
    E. $50,000-$75,000 F. above $75,000

15. **What is your current marital status?**
    A. never married B. separated C. divorced D. married E. other: ___

16. **What is the ethnicity of your child/children attending the charter school?**
    A. American Indian B. Asian/Pacific Islander C. Hispanic
    D. African American E. White/Caucasian

Appendix D:
Charter School Teacher Survey

The following questions are designed to help determine the condition of California's charter schools. We are collecting information concerning the teachers, student body, and administration of the charter schools throughout California. Your responses will be confidential and used solely for our analysis. Your completion of this survey is vital to our research. Please feel free to write in any additional information.

1. **Which of the following describes your current certification status?**
   A. certified to teach in California B. certified in other states, but not California
   C. working on California certification D. not certified in California, not working on it

2. **What is your education background?**
   A. bachelor's level degree B. master's level degree C. Ph.D. D. other: ___

3. **What is your most recent teaching experience before working at your current charter school?**
   A. public school B. private school C. home-study D. first-year teacher
   E. other: ___

4. **What is your most recent experience outside of teaching?**
   A. owned/operated a business B. general private sector C. general public sector
   D. general non-profit E. did not work F. other: ___

5. **What is the primary reason you decided to teach at this particular school?**
   A. curriculum B. mission/philosophy C. staff D. employment opportunity
   E. unhappy at previous school F. other: ___

6. **How satisfied are you with the school's educational philosophy?**
   A. very satisfied B. somewhat satisfied C. somewhat dissatisfied
   D. very dissatisfied

7. **What grade levels do you currently teach?**
   A. K-2 B. 3-5 C. 6-8 D. 9-12

8. **Do you have multiple grade level/age groups in your classroom?**
   A. yes B. no

9. **How many students are you responsible for providing instruction to in your classroom, per class?**
   A. 0-10 B. 10-20 C. 20-30 D. 30-40 E. over 40

10. **Do you have an aide in the classroom?**
    A. yes, full-time B. yes, part-time C. no

11. **Are most of your students academically performing (circle one):**
    A. above grade level B. at grade level C. below grade level

12. **Do you personally teach students who (circle all that apply):**
    A. are limited-English-proficient (LEP)
    B. are enrolled in a formal special education plan
    C. do not have an individual education plan (IEP) but would have one in a public school
    D. have serious learning impediments
    E. are eligible for free/reduced lunch

13. **Compared to your last teaching experience, how does student attitude toward learning compare?**
    A. better B. about the same C. worse D. no previous experience

14. **Compared to your last teaching experience, how does student attendance compare?**
    A. better B. about the same C. worse D. no previous experience

15. **Do you have contracts with your students?**
    A. yes B. no

16. **Compared to your last teaching experience, how involved are parents with the students in your classroom?**
    A. very involved B. somewhat involved C. not very involved D. not involved at all

17. **How many parents volunteer in your classroom on a weekly basis?**
    A. all B. about 75% C. about 50% D. less than half E. very few F. none

18. **How many hours do parent volunteers have in your classroom per week?**
    A. 1-3 B. 4-6 C. 7-10 D. more than 10 E. none

19. **How satisfied are you with your school's relationship with the local school district?**
    A. very satisfied B. somewhat satisfied C. not very satisfied D. very dissatisfied

20. **How would you describe your relationship with the teacher union?**
    A. very good B. good C. fair D. poor E. very poor

21. **How satisfied are you with your relationship to the school's governing board?**
    A. very satisfied B. somewhat dissatisfied C. not very satisfied
    D. very dissatisfied

22. **How satisfied are you with your relationship to the school's governing board?**
    A. very satisfied B. somewhat dissatisfied C. not very satisfied
    D. very dissatisfied

23. **How satisfied are you with the school's staff development program?**
    A. very satisfied B. somewhat satisfied C. not very satisfied D. very dissatisfied

24. **Are you allotted enough time during the school week for staff development?**
    A. yes B. no

25. **What is the duration of your employment contract?**
    A. more than one year B. one year C. 9 months D. less than 9 months
    E. no contract

26. **How complicated is your current contract negotiation process compared with your last teaching experience?**
    A. more complicated B. about the same C. less complicated

About the Author

Pamela A. Riley

Pamela Riley is associate director, coalition relations, for the Pacific Research Institute's Center for School Reform, which established a charter school clearinghouse in 1992. She is the editor of PRI's *How To Start a Charter School: The Basics* (1994) and the co-author with K. Lloyd Billingsley of PRI's *The Empire Strikes Back: How California's Education Establishment Is Hindering the Growth of Charter Schools* (1996) and *Expanding the Charter Idea: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform* (1999). She is a founding board member of the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC). Ms. Riley was an appointee to the Advisory Committee of the State of California's Little Hoover Commission, which undertook a study of California's charter schools. She has served as a consultant to the California Department of Education's charter school office and the Charter School Institute of the State University of New York and currently serves on the board of directors of the Towers Preparatory School, a charter school being developed in Richmond, California.

About Pacific Research Institute

The Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy promotes the principles of individual freedom and personal responsibility. The Institute believes these principles are best encouraged through policies that emphasize a free economy, private initiative, and limited government. By focusing on public policy issues such as education, the environment, economics, and social welfare, the Institute strives to foster a better understanding of the principles of a free society among leaders in government, academia, the media, and the business community.

Center for School Reform (CSR)

The CSR explores and promotes a variety of school reform strategies, including charter schools, public-private partnerships, school finance, academic standards, teacher quality, and parental choice.

Center for Enterprise and Opportunity (CEO)

Economic opportunity is the guiding principle of the Pacific Research Institute's Center for Enterprise and Opportunity. The CEO puts forth sound recommendations for eliminating regulatory and political barriers to entrepreneurial initiative. Its outreach strategy is to put practical programs and people together to encourage economic opportunity.

Center for Environmental and Regulatory Reform (CERR)

Our environmental research promotes "the new resource economics"—an approach to environmental issues that emphasizes markets, property rights, and individual incentives as a superior strategy for safeguarding the environment.

Center for Freedom and Technology (CFT)

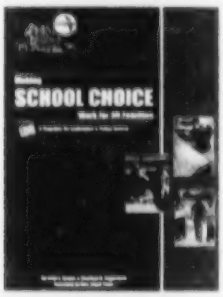
PRI's Center for Freedom and Technology is dedicated to protecting the United States' high-tech sector from policies that could hinder its progress. Advancing technology means advancing opportunity and prosperity. This advancement can only be maximized in an economy where government regulation is minimized. Our intent is to educate policymakers, the press, and the public on the specific benefits of an unregulated technology sector.

Education Studies from Pacific Research Institute

Developing and Implementing Academic Standards: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform

by Lance T. Izumi, $16.95

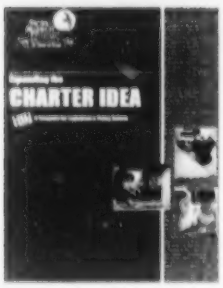
In his standards template, Center for School Reform Director Lance T. Izumi provides a practical guide for state lawmakers and education officials who want to craft challenging standards. The template includes an eight-point framework for creating world-class standards and numerous examples of excellent and poor standards worldwide. Also included are sections on implementation, assessment, and performance standards.



Making School Choice Work for All Families: A Template for Policy Reform

by John Coons and Stephen T. Sugarman, $19.95

UC-Berkeley Law Professors John Coons and Stephen Sugarman outline legal and political concerns the writer of any universal choice model must consider, describe the many different forms of choice, outline the criteria participating schools should be required to meet, and discuss how much should the scholarships be and who should pay.



Expanding the Charter Idea: A Template for Legislative and Policy Reform

by K. Lloyd Billingsley and Pamela A. Riley, $19.95

Model charter school legislation, a survey and ranking of legislation for each state, and a historical outline of the development of the charter school movement are included in this template by PRI Editorial Director Lloyd Billingsley and Center for School Reform Associate Director Pamela Riley. The template assesses charter schools as part of the wider movement toward parental choice in education and offers strategies for further expansion.

Charter Schools and the Long Road to Education Reform

by Thomas Dawson, $9.95

PRI's Policy Fellow Thomas Dawson provides a comparison of the charter school experience in Arizona and California, with a special focus on how powerful teachers unions, school boards, and other anti-choice special interests have opposed innovative charter schools in their midst.

To order any of these publications, contact:

Pacific Research Institute
755 Sansome Street, #450
San Francisco, CA 94111
Phone: (415) 989-0833
Fax: (415) 989-2411
E-mail: pripp@pacificresearch.org
http://www.pacificresearch.org

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

❑ $10,000 & above
Sir Antony Fisher Circle

❑ $5,000-$9,999
Chairman's Circle

❑ $2,500-$4,999
President's Circle

❑ $500-$2,499
Patron's Circle

❑ $250 & above
Golden Sponsor

❑ $50
Student

Name
Title/Organization
Address
City/State/Zip
Phone Fax
E-mail

Please make check payable to the PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE,
a 501(c)(3) organization. All contributions are tax-deductible

❑ I would like to make a contribution of stocks/securities, please call me for details.
I would like to make a contribution of $_____. I would prefer to make my donation with: ❑ Visa ❑ MasterCard ❑ American Express
Cardholder's Name
Card Number Exp.
Signature

Sir Antony Fisher Circle $10,000 & above
Sponsorship includes: briefing papers, Pacific Clips, President's Message, invitations to Pacific Breakfast clubs, Pacific Forums/lunches, special events, transcripts of events, selected books and fax broadcast information.

Chairman's Circle $5,000-$9,999
Sponsorship includes: Executive Summaries, Pacific Clips, President's Message, invitations to Pacific Breakfast clubs, Pacific Forums/lunches, special events, transcripts of events and selected books.

President's Circle $2,500-$4,999
Sponsorship includes Executive Summaries, Pacific Clips, President's Message, invitations to Pacific Breakfast clubs, Pacific Forums/lunches, special events and transcripts of events.

Patron's Circle $500-$2,499
Sponsorship includes: Executive Summaries, President's Message, invitations to Pacific Breakfast clubs, Pacific Forums/lunches and special events.

Golden Sponsor $250 & above
Special category for contributors of sixty years and over. Sponsorship includes: two free breakfasts for supporter or a friend, Executive Summaries, President's Message, invitations to Pacific Breakfast clubs, Pacific Forums/lunches, special events and discounts on books and briefings.

Student $50
Sponsorship includes: President's Message, invitations to events and student discounts on books and briefings.

A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out

By
Pamela A. Riley

February 2000

Additional copies of this briefing may be purchased for $9.95

PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE
755 Sansome Street, #450
San Francisco, CA 94111
Phone: (415) 989-0833
Fax: (415) 989-2411
E-mail: pripp@pacificresearch.org
http://www.pacificresearch.org

Nothing contained in this briefing is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy or as an attempt to thwart or aid the passage of any legislation.

Pacific Research Institute
755 Sansome Street, Suite 450
San Francisco, California 94111
Telephone: 415-989-0833
Fax: 415-989-2411
E-mail: pripp@pacificresearch.org
www.pacificresearch.org

BEST COPY AVAILABLE